

Standard Operating Procedure for travel by member (s) of Diplomatic Missions / UN Agencies / International Organizations based in Bhutan during the COVID-19 pandemic situation

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is aimed at facilitating the travel of the member (s) [diplomats, service staff and their family members] of Missions / UN Agencies / International Organizations based in Bhutan, who are either in Bhutan or stranded in another country due to the measures put in place by countries in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This SOP shall also be applicable to the members travelling to Bhutan for new assignment.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Royal Government of Bhutan shall be the competent authority to review and approve all requests for travel (within, outside and into the country). The following procedures shall apply:

1. Member (s) proposing to return/arrive in Bhutan.

a) Before arrival in Bhutan, the member (s) or concerned Mission / UN Agency / International Organization shall:

- i) inform MFA or the nearest Bhutanese Embassies, Missions and Consulates about the member (s)'s current location with details such as Name, Passport Number, Identity Card Number (if applicable), Nationality, Age, Gender, Occupation, Working Agency, Contact details, Intended Date of Travel, Flight Details, Transit point (s) and Point of Entry.
- ii) provide the details of vehicles, drivers and point of entries for those traveling by road to the nearest Bhutanese Embassies, Missions, Consulates or MFA.

b) Upon arrival in Bhutan, the member (s) shall:

- i) submit a **Health Declaration Form** at the point of entry to ensure that there are no medical threats to oneself or others and for the purpose of timely medical interventions, if required. The form is attached herewith and can also be accessed at www.moh.gov.bt.
- ii) follow strict physical distancing and undergo thermal or any other necessary screening procedures as per Health Protocol.
- iii) remain at a designated quarantine facility mandatorily for 21 days and all costs associated with quarantine, testing and medical treatment/intervention shall be borne by the concerned member (s) or the concerned Missions / UN Agencies / International Organization.
- iv) strictly adhere to the SOP for Quarantine at the designated facility for COVID-19. The SOP can be accessed at www.moh.gov.bt.
- v) be released from quarantine on the 22nd day upon testing negative for COVID-19. If tested positive, the Royal Government will offer all required treatment but the cost of treatment shall be borne by the patient or his/her concerned Office on medical insurance as applicable.
- vi) minimize interactions with the public and avoid visiting public places and unnecessary gatherings for two weeks after release from quarantine or treatment.
- vii) inform MFA once the member (s) reaches/resumes office.

2. Member (s) proposing to leave Bhutan.

The member (s) or the concerned Mission / UN Agency / International Organization shall:

- i) seek approval from MFA and the request should include purpose and the details of the travel itinerary.
- ii) arrange all other aspects of travel including permission to enter the country of destination. However, in the event of lockdown in the country, the transit passes for the movement of vehicles transporting the member (s) shall be issued by the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs (MoHCA). The transit passes shall be obtained by the concerned Mission / UN Agency / International Organization from MoHCA on MFA's recommendation. The transportation shall be specified while applying for the transit passes.
- iii) request the Ministry of Health (MoH) for RT-PCR testing and issuance of **COVID-19 Free Health Certificate** through MFA. If tested positive, the Royal Government will offer all required treatment but the cost of treatment shall be borne by the patient or his/her concerned Office on medical insurance as applicable. The contact point is Dr. Sonam Wangchuk, Royal Centre for Disease Control, Mobile No. +975-17123183 and email address: swangchuk@health.gov.bt.
- iv) inform MFA once the member (s) reaches the country of destination.

3. Medical Evacuation (Medevac) of member (s).

The concerned Mission / UN Agency / International Organization shall:

- i) arrange the charter flights or medically equipped aircrafts in consultation with the MFA and the Department of Air Transport, Ministry of Information and Communications (MoIC). The cost of charter and obtaining necessary clearances to land in the country (s) of destination shall be the responsibility of the concerned Mission / UN Agency / International Organization.
- ii) be screened for COVID-19 prior to departure. For testing and related procedures, the details are outlined in paragraph 2 (iii).
- iii) decide whether medical escorts and attention should be provided to the patient during the flight in consultation with MoH.
- iv) arrange transportation from the place of stay to the point of exit in consultation with MoH as per the Health Protocol. In the event of lockdown in the country, the details for transportation as outlined in paragraph 2 (ii) shall apply.
- v) inform MFA once the member (s) reaches the country (s) of destination.

4. Movement of essential member (s) during lockdown in the country.

MFA shall:

- i) notify all Missions / UN Agencies / International Organizations once the government's order on the imposition of lockdown is issued.

ii) advise that the movement of only a bare minimum number of essential member (s) of the Missions / UN Agencies / International Organizations and their vehicles shall be allowed during the period. They will also be advised to mostly restrict their movement within the limits of the area of their location.

iii) request the Missions / UN Agencies / International Organizations through a notification to identify a list of essential member (s) with critical functions. The list shall include the registration numbers of the vehicles to be used for the movement of those identified essential member (s), including the details of the drivers, if required. All information shall be provided within the set deadline following which, no further requests shall be entertained.

iv) review and share the approved list with the competent authority (MoHCA and the Road Safety and Transport Authority, MoIC) enforcing the lockdown. Thereafter, the Missions / UN Agencies / International Organizations shall obtain the movement clearance from the competent authority.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Royal Government of Bhutan**

03 June 2020