

**MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S RESPONSE TO THE DELAYS IN CLEARING HIV DRUGS AT
GHANA'S PORTS INAPPROPRIATE AND HIGHLY IRRESPONSIBLE - MINORITY**

The Minority in Parliament vehemently denounces the Ministry of Health's response, or lack thereof, to the extended delay in clearing HIV antiretroviral drugs at Ghana's ports. We consider the Ministry's press statement issued on October 7, 2023, as highly inappropriate and a dereliction of its duty to safeguard the health and well-being of Ghanaians.

First and foremost, the Ministry's press statement fails to offer any valid reasons for the prolonged delay in clearing the consignment of HIV antiretroviral drugs at the ports. The excuse citing the high volume of the consignment requiring additional funds for clearance is utterly untenable. Such consignments do not appear suddenly at ports of entry without prior notice to receiving agencies. The Ministry had ample time, spanning weeks if not months, to prepare the necessary documentation or secure funding warrants for the timely clearance of these essential consumables upon their arrival.

The Ministry's statement comes across as an insult to our donor partners, implying that they irresponsibly failed to provide prior warning of a 'high' volume of support, thereby catching Ghanaian authorities off guard. This insinuation is highly reprehensible and an irresponsible attempt to jeopardize the generosity of our donors towards Ghana and its Persons Living with HIV (PLHIV).

It is also mind-boggling that the Ministry of Health would take two to three months, from the receipt of a shipping consignment in July to a press statement in October, to claim that it has finally taken measures to secure extra funds for clearance. This smacks of incompetence of the highest order. Even if we were to assume, though not conceding, that the Ministry only became aware of the volume of the consignment in July, what prevented it from taking these so-called 'necessary steps' in July itself, rather than waiting until October?

Moreover, extending the already three-month delay by another week is not only highly insensitive but also utterly irresponsible. PLHIV cannot and should not be made to wait beyond October 13, 2023, for drugs that arrived in the country three months ago. With the advancements in port operations, including 24-hour clearance of goods, there is no valid reason why these vital medical consumables cannot be cleared within 24 hours, should the government genuinely prioritize the health of PLHIV.

While the Ministry concluded its statement with a mere rhetoric about its steadfast commitment to safeguarding the health of all citizens, it inconsiderately downplayed the impact of the current health crisis caused by the shortage of antiretroviral drugs. By stating that only 4% of PLHIV are affected by the shortage, the Ministry overlooks the fact that this 4% represents some 15,000 fellow Ghanaians—brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, and professionals from all walks of life. Their health concerns should not be ignored by an institution entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the well-being of all Ghanaians.

Furthermore, the Ministry's press statement fails to address several critical issues. The Ministry claims to have applied for and obtained tax clearance waivers for the antiretroviral drugs at the ports. However, it is insufficient to merely claim to have received these waivers. The Ministry should, at the very least, provide evidence of receiving these waivers by specifying the date when these waivers were acquired.

We previously recommended, in our press statement, that the Ministry collaborates with the Ministry of Finance to automate tax waivers for medical consumables and equipment, thereby preventing delays caused by tax waiver issues. Regrettably, the Ministry has chosen to ignore this important recommendation.

We also expressed concerns about the widening funding gap in addressing Ghana's National HIV/AIDS program and how the non-payment of counterpart funds is exacerbating this situation. The Ministry has remained conspicuously silent on this matter, providing no responses regarding its commitment to fulfilling its funding obligations moving forward.

In conclusion, the Ministry of Health must be proactive in addressing the health challenges of Ghanaians and residents and stop acting like a rudderless storm-tossed ship or a fire service responding only to emergencies.

At this juncture, the least it can do is offer an unqualified apology to Ghanaians for its failure to perform the simple function of clearing donated goods for PLHIV.

As the Minority, we firmly believe that Ghana deserves better, and the excuses must cease.

--Signed--

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