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## LIASA STATEMENT ON COVID-19

LIASA recognises the global impact of COVID-19 (the coronavirus) as well as the significant influence on everyday life. Library and information workers are on the frontline as they serve their communities be it public, school, academic or special libraries and LIASA is committed to supporting LIASA members, LIASA staff, LIS workers and LIS users during these uncertain times.

In the address to the nation on 15 March, the President of South Africa, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa declared a national disaster and listed the various measures from government to curb and contain the outbreak of the coronavirus (see <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-03-15-president-ramaphosas-covid-19-address-in-23-bullet-points/>). These include changes to the school calendar year, limits on public gatherings and travel restrictions. No explicit directives were issued in respect of public services such as Libraries.

LIASA advises LIS workers to follow the advice, information and guidance of their institutions in respect of the responses to combatting COVID-19 and to flattening the curve. In addition, the National Department of Health (<http://www.health.gov.za/index.php/outbreaks/145-corona-virus-outbreak/465-corona-virus-outbreak>) and the World Health Organisation (<https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/resources/posters/en/>) are sources of authoritative and trustworthy information. These resource should be shared with users of our library services. At this time library and information services have a critical role to play in the dissemination of legitimate news and information and actively battle fake news.

LIASA encourages a responsible, calm, approach to combating the virus and asks the LIS sector to maintain social distancing, to institute and enforce good hygiene practices and be vigilant for the symptoms of the virus. We remind LIS staff of their obligations to their employers and to engage with them on the specifics of their situation.

All SALW activities not in line with the combatting of COVID-19 (corona virus) are to be cancelled with immediate effect. Social distancing (maintaining spaces of 1 to 2 metres per person); limiting gatherings to 100 people; regular hygiene practices including washing hands for 20 seconds or more must be in place. Self-isolation is highly encouraged and we urge everyone to find innovative and creative solutions to promoting the use of Libraries while being mindful that physical access to these places might be constrained in the current attempt to prevent the spread of the virus.

Furthermore, LIASA calls on all employers to seek a balance between maintaining the library and information services to the public while protecting the staff. There is an urgent need for protective gear and a sanitized environment. Rotating and limiting access to libraries puts library staff at great risk given the contagious nature of COVID-19. LIASA calls on all employers to find innovative solutions that will allow for the continuation of LIS services but failing this, to close all libraries and information services centres and to provide alternative channels for these services to continue even if needs be on a reduced level.

This call is a hard one for the Professional Body which is deeply committed to providing information to our communities. However, we had to balance this against our Libraries becoming a vector for this virulent danger to our society.

**Ms N Crowster**

**LIASA President**

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