

Tunis, Tunisia, October 4 (Infosplusgabon) - Facing a critical rise in the spread of the Coronavirus disease in Tunisia, Prime Minister Hicham Mechichi, on Saturday announced a package of measures designed to curb the unbridled spread of the new virus, recorded in recent weeks in most parts of the country.

In a broadcast on the public television channel, "Wataniya 1", Mechichi said that "the figures and data" concerning the health situation "are not reassuring and require a firm stand, urgent and immediate decisions".

According to the latest assessment from the Ministry of Health, the number of contaminations has exceeded 20,000 cases and the number of deaths has reached 276, figures that have skyrocketed especially after the reopening of borders at the end of March.

Among the decisions announced, which will be in force for two weeks, is the obligation for citizens to wear masks in closed public spaces and transport.

Secondly, the Prime Minister has ordered the banning of all cultural, sporting, political, scientific or commercial gatherings and events and public and private festivities.

He also stressed the strict application of health protocols in educational, administrative and commercial establishments open to the public.

"No laxity should be tolerated and any offending establishment that will endanger the lives of Tunisians, will be immediately closed," he threatened.

To avoid congestion, especially in public transportation and in the public highway, the government has decided to reorganize the work regime in public administrations by opting for the single session instead of the double session currently in force, effectively reducing working hours, with the exception of certain vital sectors such as education, health and safety.

However, Mechichi ruled out a return to general confinement as was the case during the first wave of the epidemic, because, he said, "the country can no longer bear the paralysis of the economy".

Already facing serious economic and social difficulties, Tunisia has recorded an unprecedented drop of more than 11% in its growth rate during the second half of the year, due to the pandemic.

According to experts, the problem of unemployment, which affects some 700,000 people, or more than 15% of the working population, has been aggravated with the technical dismissal of about 160,000 employees.

The Prime Minister also said he gave instructions to governors to establish partial confinement and declare a curfew, if necessary, in areas considered hotspots.

To address overcrowding in health facilities, he promised to increase the number of oxygen beds in public hospitals from 400 to 1,200 by the end of October and from 150 to 700 in the private sector.

As for the number of intensive care beds, they will be increased from 95 to 220 in university hospitals (CHU).

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