

HANOVER OF THE COVID-19 TESTING LABORATORY AND PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

By Mr Otto Shikongo - Chief Executive Officer of Debmarine Namibia

Tuesday, 11 August 2020

Minster of Health and Social Services	- Hon. Kalumbi Shangula
Vice-Chancellor of the University of Namibia	- Prof. Kenneth Matengu
Executive Director of the Ministry of Health and Social Services	- Mr Ben Nangombe
Chief Executive Officer of Namibia Institute of Pathology	- Dr. David Uirab
Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences	- Prof. Tim Rennie
Executive Management of the University of Namibia	
Executive Management of Debmarine Namibia	
Esteemed Doctors and frontline health professionals	
Members of the Media	
Ladies and Gentlemen,	

Good evening and thank you to each every one of you for being here with us today. I am proud to announce that Debmarine Namibia acquired a COVID-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing equipment and entered into a partnership with the University of Namibia School of Medicine to conduct the tests.

We at Debmarine Namibia, remain committed to supporting the Government to deepen its efforts in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognise the need to increase testing capacity and capability in our country and it is in response to this that the Board and Management of Debmarine Namibia supported the purchase and sponsorship of a complete COVID-19 PCR test equipment.

The COVID-19 PCR test equipment will be housed here, at the University of Namibia's Hage G. Geingob Campus, School of Medicine. I am pleased to hear that this sponsorship has

been approved and certified by the Ministry of Health and Social Services and will be supported by the Namibia Institute of Pathology.

We believe strongly that in order to defeat this pandemic, we must co-ordinate, work together and do everything that we can to mitigate and reduce the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. While these are uncharted waters for everyone, we fully understand the tremendous pressure Government is under and therefore I am pleased that our company can assist with this immediate need. As the saying goes: “There is an opportunity in every crisis and the deeper the crisis, the better the opportunity can be.” The opportunity here is that Namibia will have the testing capacity well beyond COVID-19 pandemic and secondly, this unit will contribute towards capacity building for the students at UNAM medical school.

In recent weeks we have seen the number of positive cases spiking in our country and it is our sincere hope that this **N\$3.6 million investment** will play a vital role in the turnaround time of COVID-19 test results. The full sponsorship by Debmarine Namibia includes the testing unit, all the equipment required to fully equip a lab for COVID-19 testing, supply of consumables (including test kits), training and maintenance for a period of one year. The PCR unit has the capacity to produce 250 tests per 8-hour shift and can be upgraded to double that capacity. But I will leave this detail to Dr Emmanuel Nepolo to expand on during the Tour of the laboratory.

Furthermore, having this testing laboratory stationed here at the UNAM School of Medicine will increase the diagnostic and prognostic testing process of COVID-19 and complement the Namibia Institute of Pathology (NIP) in order to accelerate the country’s testing capacity.

Honourable Minister, ladies and gentlemen, as a business, our first and most important value is to **Put Safety First**. We value the health and safety of our employees and are equally committed to delivering support to our country throughout this difficult period. Our aim is to protect our workforce, protect the business - keep our operations running safely, whilst proactively supporting and supplementing Government efforts.

The COVID-19 PCR test equipment will add an additional safety layer to the robust precautionary measures we already have in place for our employees. As a marine

company, one of the additional benefits of acquiring such a machine is to allow 100% testing of all sea-going employees before boarding our marine diamond exploration and recovery vessels, and shore based workforce and family members, on a needs basis.

Deciding to collaborate with the UNAM School of Medicine is part of our commitment toward nurturing talent through youth development. We believe that UNAM has the capacity and capability to operate the COVID-19 PCR test equipment. Debmarine Namibia and UNAM have a long-standing partnership in different areas of studies and this laboratory will offer medical students real time clinical opportunity that is benefiting the country greatly. I am pleased to announce that we have agreed that this COVID-19 PCR test equipment ownership will vest in UNAM post the COVID-19 pandemic to test other viruses.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the UNAM School of Medicine team more especially Dr Emmanuel Nepolo and members of the Debmarine Namibia Executive Danie van Aswegen (Manager: Strategic Projects Portfolio) and Andre Liebenberg (Senior HR Manager) for diligently overseeing the cumbersome process of managing the procurement, delivery, set-up, training and operationalisation of the facility in liaison with esteemed officials from the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Our gratitude also goes to De Beers for enabling Debmarine Namibia access to acquire the COVID-19 PCR test equipment and the 25 ventilator machines still on order from Germany that we pledged to handover to Government earlier this year as soon as they arrive, at a time when these machines are highly in demand globally and not easy to source.

Finally, we are grateful for the opportunity to serve the Government and our brave Nation with this equipment. For us in the diamond recovery industry, like the product we recover, we believe we will make great achievements when All Hands Are On Deck to Succeed Together. After all, for those who understand geology, every diamond was once a piece of charcoal that through intense heat and pressure became much harder than stone and turned into a precious gem.

I thank you.