



STATEMENT BY FEAFFA ON THE CHANGE IN APPROACH TO THE MANDATORY TESTING OF TRUCK DRIVERS BY THE GOVERNMENT OF UGANDA

Nairobi, 31st December 2021: The Federation of East African Freight Forwarders Associations (FEAFFA) – the regional umbrella association of customs agents and freight forwarders in East Africa has learned of the change in approach to the covid19 testing of truck drivers vide two letters by Ugandan Authorities dated 13th December 2021 and 20th December 2021, informing and instructing line health officials of changes in the covid protocols on truck drivers crossing the borders in regards to covid testing and implications of the test results. This is in view of the surge in cases of the Omicron covid19 variant spreading across the borders, a variant that is more transmissible and indeed requiring a review of the current protocols and containment measures including those concerning cross border truck drivers.

The changes raise a number of concerns;

- a) Whereas Uganda seems to be taking lead, the challenge being addressed cuts across the EAC region and beyond. The rest of the EAC should be involved given that this is a deviation from the Regional Electronic Cargo Driver Tracking System (RECDTS) that the EAC region is currently using.
- b) Whereas Ugandan authorities are giving assurances that the changes will not cause traffic jams at the borders, our experience is that there will be traffic pileup at the borders because of the logistical limitations in setting up the system, the lack of awareness among the targeted travelers including truck drivers, the lack of sufficient holding bays for the big cargo trucks among others. The region has been setting up systems to ensure no more testing is done at the borders to avoid traffic snail-ups.
- c) The new measure is introducing a direct additional cost to the private sector which is likely to hurt the end consumers of the cargo being traded across our borders. The private sector is currently taking advantage of the free covid19 testing provided by some of the partner states, something that this new approach will deprive them. In addition, other operational expenses such as increase in demurrage charges are likely to arise due to the increase in truck turnaround times as the private sector attempts to adjust to these new measures.
- d) The cost for the test is quite high for the logistics sector to absorb. It also does not illustrate the fact that truck drivers are on our roads for the benefit of all EAC citizens.
- e) How does this relate with the Covid19 vaccination campaign for truck drivers and the proposed introduction of an EAC covid19 passport? It is important to appreciate that a typical truck driver in the EAC crosses a border almost every two days while on service to this region.
- f) How is the rest of the region going to be brought on board given that this change affects the entire EAC region?

Appreciating the volatile nature of Covid-19 especially the Omicron variant, the Federation of East African Freight Forwarders Associations and the entire EAC transport and logistics industry recommends as follows;

- i. The Government of Uganda should suspend the new approach to mandatory testing of truck drivers in the framework of the Regional Electronic Cargo Driver Tracking System (RECTDS). The RECTDS has served the region well and should be enhanced to accommodate the emerging covid19 trends and the corresponding containment measures without significant disruptions to the transport and logistics sector as is being introduced in Uganda.
- ii. All EAC partner states should be brought on board to avoid causing unnecessary tensions among EAC partner states. The EAC secretariat should coordinate the review process to ensure all national concerns including Uganda's concerns are taken into consideration. This will minimize disruptions as they were witnessed when covid19 first struck. We need to learn from our past experiences as a region.
- iii. All EAC Partner States should consider providing free covid19 testing for truck drivers as essential service providers. This will boost the functioning and benefits from the RECTDS. For fully vaccinated and recently tested truck drivers, health authorities in the EAC should consider less stringent and cost-friendly alternatives such as rapid tests. This will reduce the number of tests truck drivers are subjected to given the significantly high frequency with which truck drivers cross borders.
- iv. For frequent and essential cross-border travelers such as truck drivers, provisions should be made for their tests in one country to continue being recognized and accepted across borders as provided in the RECTDS.
- v. Fast track the adoption of the EAC Covid19 vaccine passport. This will promote uptake of the covid19 vaccine among truck drivers and other logistics sector workers.
- vi. As a normal practice, all stakeholders in the regional transport and logistics industry should be adequately mobilized and sensitized on this new approach before it is implemented. The consequences of a sudden shift in approach are likely to more harmful as we are starting to witness.

Signed by



Fred R. Seka
PRESIDENT - FEAFFA

-Ends-

For more information contact:

For FEAFFA

Elias Rwamanyonyi Baluku

Ag. Executive Director

Federation of East African Freight Forwarders Associations

Tel: +254738150396

Email: baluku@feaffa.com

About FEAFFA

The Federation of East African Freight Forwarders Associations (FEAFFA) is a regional private sector apex body of the Customs Clearing and Freight Forwarding industry in East Africa representing over 2500 clearing firms. The Federation aims at promoting a professional freight logistics industry for trade facilitation and regional economic growth. FEAFFA strives to address the challenges experienced by its members at Association, firm, and individual levels through the provision of training and other aspects of capacity building. The Federation advocates for the removal of barriers that impede the full implementation of the East African Community (EAC) Customs Union.

