

March 19, 2020

Dear students and families,

In this uncertain time, it is more important than ever to ensure clear and prompt communication, and I am writing to provide an update on the plans for Tujenge Scholars Program over the upcoming weeks.

In light of the rapid spread of COVID-19 (also known as coronavirus) throughout East Africa, and despite the lack of confirmed cases in Burundi, we have made the decision to suspend physical classes when we return from spring break next week. As scheduled, students will take the next week (March 23 – March 27) as vacation. However, classes for the weeks of March 30 and April 6 will be conducted remotely, with classes interacting over WhatsApp rather than in-person. It is likely that classes will continue to be taught remotely for longer than two weeks, but we will provide more guidance in the coming weeks, once we can evaluate more carefully the dynamics of COVID-19 in Burundi.

Starting on March 21, students who do not live in Tujenge-provided housing will be asked to self-isolate in their homes in Bujumbura. Students living in Tujenge-provided housing will either return to their families upcountry, or will continue to live in Tujenge housing, depending on each student's individual situation. All students will need to have access to WhatsApp so that they can continue to learn from home. Teaching staff will work with students remotely, and essential support staff will continue to work as is prudent to ensure that students can continue learning even in the midst of uncertainty. The details of classes are still being developed, but over the next few days, students will be told how to participate and given updated learning expectations.

I wish to remind families that despite now doing their learning at home, students are still responsible for spending most of their days studying. As much as possible, please avoid giving them additional housework just because they are now spending their days at home.

Tujenge Africa Foundation is foremost committed to students' safety, and I believe that as an organization we have an obligation to set an example of responsible leadership for the future leaders who are pupils with the Scholars Program. It is no secret that COVID-19 requires swift, decisive action by every one of us in order to decrease the rate of spread and protect each other. I hope that Tujenge Africa Foundation can set an example for other organizations around Burundi and reinforce the message that we are all collectively responsible for containing the outbreak and keeping our communities safe.

I call on our students and their families to set an example in their communities by eliminating any unnecessary social interaction, practicing good handwashing techniques, and helping to propagate reliable information about the virus. Large gatherings of people, including sporting events and religious services, and even small gatherings of friends should be avoided by students and by students' families. By limiting our interactions with others, we reduce the risk that we infect others or become infected ourselves. Our primary responsibility in this time is to protect others by isolating and protecting ourselves.

However, in so doing, we must fight against the tendency to ostracize and marginalize the sick or foreign amongst us. We must reaffirm our support of everyone in our communities even as we isolate ourselves to slow the spread of the virus. Now, as ever, is a time for all of us to be examples of the Tujenge values of character, fortitude, perseverance, and radical empathy toward anyone suffering from sickness or anyone who is different from us.

We must also continue the fight against misinformation, and I call on our students to ensure that they are not sharing false or misleading information about COVID-19 or the worldwide situation. Tujenge is grounded in a tradition of academic honesty, and all of our students can be powerful forces to combat the spread of bad information by verifying all of the information that they share, and constantly asking critical questions about the information that they encounter. Tujenge will continue to be a nexus of information for students and our communities, and we are reaffirming our commitment to open communication throughout the upcoming weeks.

In closing, I offer these small pieces of advice: look out for one another and don't panic. This is an unprecedented and challenging situation, and we will weather it together. Please don't hesitate to connect with me or other members of your community if you need support. I'm available to talk any time – day or night – if you have concerns or simply need to offload a small bit of the pressure that we are all experiencing.

Sincerely,



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