

## **Merkel calls for international cooperation against virus**

23/04/2020 18:21 by admin

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***Merkel chastised some states for moving too quickly to relax measures, however, saying they're risking setting back what the country has achieved. (Reuters)***

**Berlin:** German Chancellor Angela Merkel called Thursday for international cooperation on the development of a vaccination for the new coronavirus, saying that the pandemic transcends borders and can only be countered jointly.

Speaking to parliament in a session where lawmakers sat at a careful distance from one another in line with the country's social-distancing regulations, Merkel said German scientists were busily researching the virus at home, but that "international cooperation against the virus is extremely important."

"Science is never national, science serves mankind," she said. "Thus it goes without saying that when medication or a vaccination is found, tested, released and is ready for use, it must be available all around the world and affordable for the whole world."

U.S. President Donald Trump has announced he is halting funding for the World Health Organization to review how it has handled the outbreak, but Merkel lauded the agency's work in the fight against the coronavirus.

"For the German government, I emphasize the WHO is an indispensable partner and we support them in their mandate," she said.

Germany this week began slowly easing restrictions after being on lockdown for weeks, allowing small shops to start opening while keeping social distancing in place. All states are also moving ahead with regulations requiring protective masks in public transport, shops or both.

Merkel chastised some states for moving too quickly to relax measures, however, saying they're risking setting back what the country has achieved.

Germany has reported more than 150,000 infections but a relatively low death toll of about 5,000, while more than 100,000 people have recovered, according to a count kept by Johns Hopkins University.

The rate of new infections has been slowing, but Merkel cautioned "we're still walking on thin ice, one could also say the thinnest ice." "We're not living in the final phase of the pandemic, but still at the beginning. We will be living with this virus for a long time."

Merkel told parliament that in her time as chancellor the decision to "restrict personal freedoms" in the fight against the virus was one of the hardest she has made, and urged people to proceed carefully now as steps were being taken to reduce restrictions so as not to give up hard-won gains.

"Let us not squander what we have achieved and risk a setback. It would be a shame if premature hope ultimately punishes us all. Let us all stay on the path in the next phase of the pandemic: smart and careful. It's a long journey; we can't run out of stamina and air too soon." Still, she said she understood the urge for people to end their

isolation, especially among the elderly and disabled population where loneliness can already be a problem.

“In the times of a pandemic, it can be much lonelier without visitors. It is cruel when nobody can be there as strength fades and life comes to an end, aside from the nurses who are doing their very best,” she said.

“Let us never forget these people and the temporary isolation they have to live in. These 80-and 90-year-olds built our country; they are the foundation of the prosperity in which we now live. They are Germany, just like their children and grandchildren, and we also fight the fight against this virus for them.”

- AP