International Partnership in Times of Crisis:

Volkswagen South Africa to convert vacant plant into temporary medical facility

The German government and Volkswagen South Africa (VWSA) have joined forces in a public-private partnership to convert an old VWSA component plant in Korsten, Port Elizabeth (Eastern Cape) into a temporary medical facility for Covid-19 patients.

The facility, which will be converted in phases, could accommodate up to 4,000 beds for patients once fully operational. This would include high-acuity patients who require oxygenation.

Dr Gerd Müller, German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development: "We will either beat Covid-19 worldwide together or not at all. That is why I support Volkswagen South Africa's plan to turn a currently unused factory into a facility for Covid-19 patients. Our contribution forms part of our worldwide Emergency Covid-19 Support Programme. It aims to strengthen and expand health infrastructure, provide emergency aid to stabilise regions in crisis and refugee camps, particularly in the Sahel region and the arc of crisis surrounding Syria, and safeguard jobs and food supply."

German Ambassador Dr Martin Schäfer: “This is an excellent example of international cooperation in times of crisis. The Coronavirus does not stop at international borders. It does not distinguish between nationality, skin colour or origin. It affects us all, across the globe. The best way to address this common challenge is by working together and by acting in solidarity.”

The Volkswagen plant, which is currently not in use, will be converted and used as an overflow medical facility. The planned conversion is the result of collaboration between VWSA, the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber, the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality and the Eastern Cape Department of Health. VWSA will contribute € 1.37 million (R28 million) to the project.

“Solidarity is crucial in a crisis – and Covid-19 is an unprecedented global threat,” said Thomas Schaefer, Volkswagen Group South Africa Chairman and Managing
Director. “Through collaboration we will be able to achieve the position of strength we will need to fight the Covid-19 virus.

“VWSA has devoted its time to finding innovative ways in which we can combat the scourge of Covid-19 and prepare the Metro to care for those who are infected. We are highly appreciative of the financial support from the BMZ/GIZ as it will help us to continue to offer support to protect our citizens and our country.”

The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development supports the setup of the facility and further activities of a strategic alliance in Nelson Mandela Bay with € 5.2 million (R105 million). Out of this, the conversion of the plant will be supported with € 4 million and € 1.2 million will be provided for the procurement of protective gear (PPE) for regional tertiary hospitals, regional Primary Care Clinics and 49 COVID-19 test centres.

Germany’s Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), as the German implementing agency, will foster the cooperation with the private sector to establish a sustainable strategic alliance in Nelson Mandela Bay.

The Eastern Cape Department of Health is contributing a considerable amount for managing and operating the facility.

The medical facility is to be completed in phases and handed over to government as the need for medical care in the Metro develops. The preparation of the first phase is currently ongoing and will take approximately six to eight weeks to be completed.

The conversion of the Volkswagen plant is the latest cooperation project between South Africa and Germany to address the Covid-19 crisis. Germany has already provided R40 million to South Africa to acquire test kits and hospital equipment to fight Covid-19.

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