

# The President's Desk



## PROVIDING LEADERSHIP DURING UNCERTAINTY

Dear Member,

The World and Kenya is at a standstill grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has caused untold misery and uncertainty on many sectors of the economy including the public relations practice.

Our colleagues in the industry have not been spared as they have been directly and indirectly affected by this pandemic. We feel their pain and frustration and pray that we can ride the pandemic wave and have it behind us soonest.

### Support of the PR industry in combating the pandemic

While the government continues to work hard to contain the spread of this virus, our professional colleagues in private and public sectors continue to supplement and reinforce government efforts in their individual capacities.

PRSK has been on the forefront in providing professional support during this crisis. A team from PRSK was involved in the production of key messaging for the COVID-19 campaign and we continue to reinforce and amplify government messages on our platforms. Our colleagues at the Ministry of Health, Kenyatta National Hospital, Kenya Medical Research Institute, Kenya Medical Supplies Authority, Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs, Ministry of Interior and National Co-ordination, Department of Defence among others, have done a sterling job under immense pressure and occupational challenges.

We also have a dedicated PRSK team supporting the Ministry of Tourism to strengthen its communication capacity to COVID-19 response in the tourism sector. This follows a successful engagement with the Cabinet Secretary a few weeks ago.

Conscious of the mental health burden, we are also running a joint campaign with Engage Burson Cohn & Wolfe and the Association of Public Relations and Communication Management Firms (APReCOM) on social media platforms under the hashtag *#StayInReachOut* challenge. This campaign implores us to identify our circle of five and reach out to them on a daily basis. It is important that we spread the love and assure our contacts that we are in this together.

By no small measure, this pandemic has reinforced the importance of strategic communication for leadership within organisations. Leaders who manifest empathy, compassion, transparency, and accountability connect more with the audiences in times of emergencies. The few leaders who have won public confidence in their response to this pandemic, have done so on the strength of authentic communication.

As top leaders in organisations make far reaching decisions that will affect livelihoods of employees, its upon PR professionals to rise up to the occasion and provide quality counsel on how to manage stakeholder relations with empathy and compassion.

While we acknowledge that misinformation and fake news propagate fear amongst Kenyans, it is our duty as PR professionals to call out any misrepresented facts, misinformation and fake news on our social platforms and elsewhere. We can be on the forefront in fighting the pandemic as well as the fake news scourge.

On this score, let me quote some good advice I recently came across from Mr Scott Kronick, President & CEO of Ogilvy Public Relations, Asia Pacific. In his paper, Implications of coronavirus: How to communicate in turbulent times, Mr Kronick opines thus: *First, it's crucial that communicators make sure they are dealing with accurate information. Times of crisis can be confusing and frightening, resulting in an amplification of speculation, conspiracy theories, obfuscation and censorship. Communicators must ensure that they are dealing with facts and not fiction, real information and not rumor. Second, it's crucial to have an understanding of the ultimate goals of the communications being delivered. This is not a time to try to market or sell, but rather it is a time to reinforce the values that define leading organizations. What can be done given the various objectives we are working to address? It all comes to down communicating effectively. And last, communicators need to properly place the ongoing crisis and issue in a greater context. What does it mean for globalization, economic growth and more—and how does that play out as the world works to get through the crisis together?*

### GA Board membership

In the midst of all this gloom, good news has come our way. Fellow of the Public Relations Society of Kenya (FPRSK) Peter Mutie and myself are joining the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management Board from 1st July this year. This is an honour for the Kenyan practitioners who follow in footsteps of FPRSK Jane Gitau, whose term on the board ends in July this year; and Fellow Kentice Tikolo who has also previously served on the board. Kenya's voice in the global discourse will be as strong as ever.

### PRSK response to the new normal

This pandemic has had a huge impact on the plans and operations of the Society. Here are just a few critical activities in adapting to the COVID-19 emergency:

- Our Annual General Meeting slated for 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020 has been postponed to a later date. In the meantime, we are actively evaluating options that can facilitate the hosting of a virtual AGM complete with an online voting component for the retiring office bearers. This option may require the hosting of a Special General Meeting to facilitate a PRSK Constitution change that can allow for online voting as the current provisions do not allow for a non-physical electoral process. We shall update you accordingly, as we beg for your indulgence.
- We also plan to carry out online training for all the CPD programmes from mid this month. Further details on how this will be rolled out will be shared in due course.

### Members benevolence scheme

I encourage you to sign up for the PRSK Benevolent Scheme which was introduced to support members and their families by supplementing last expense budgets.

Members willing to join will be required to contribute Ksh 2300 annually to cover spouse, four parents and up to four children.

For more information on how to sign up and the requirements, please get in touch with our membership team via [membership@prsk.co.ke](mailto:membership@prsk.co.ke).

### Annual subscriptions

I urge you to honour your annual subscriptions as they are important in the smooth operations of our society, and for you to get access to our online resource centre.

Finally, as we continue to support the government's efforts in the fight against coronavirus, I ask that you observe the following guidelines from the Ministry of Health:

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based sanitiser
- Stay at home and wear a mask when you step out
- Maintain 1.5m social distancing

Each of us now has the responsibility to reinvigorate our commitment to our profession by developing situation conscious plans to guide our respective institutions.

Spread the love and stay safe!

**Dr Wilfred Marube, MPRSK**  
President, Public Relations Society of Kenya