

EU unveils US\$75m package for Zim

Sunday Mail by Kuda Bwititi, Chief Reporter

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THE European Union (EU) has unveiled a US\$75 million package to fight Covid-19 in Zimbabwe. Of this, US\$40 million was released through the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)’s Health Development Fund, while US\$35 million was pledged by EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen.

Relations between Zimbabwe and the EU have improved in the past few years.

In his Independence Day speech last month, President Mnangagwa praised the 27-member bloc for easing its sanctions on Harare.

Responding to questions from The Sunday Mail last week, EU Ambassador to Zimbabwe Mr Timo Olkkonen said the bloc was one of the major donors in Zimbabwe’s fight against coronavirus.

“We are working with our partners on several fronts in the fight against Covid-19. The EU in Zimbabwe is one of the major donors of the health sector and our support goes through the UNICEF-administered multi-donor Health Development Fund (HDF).

“In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have released an additional US\$40 million to the HDF, on top of previous support of 126 million Euro (about US\$138 million). This money will mainly support — through our implementing partner UNICEF — the Government’s effort in the fight against Covid-19.”

Ambassador Olkkonen said US\$15 million had already been distributed for materials to fight the pandemic.

“About US\$15 million of that top-up has already been allocated for equipment (including Covid-19 testing kits and PPE), for mass awareness campaigns and for financial support to frontline staff — while we maintain our support to access to healthcare for the general population.

“In addition, we have requested our other partners, ranging from international and local NGOs to EU-funded civil society organisations and the Spotlight Initiative implemented through the UN systems, to re-route some of their activities and EU funding towards the Covid-19 response.”

Ambassador Olkkonen said the EU had committed an additional package of US\$35 million.

“There is also an additional package of about US\$35 million, which our Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, announced to the President recently. This package has three components:

- a) Immediate additional funding to the HDF programme to import mainly more testing kits and protective equipment while maintaining adequate level of service in health facilities,
- b) Additional humanitarian aid funding through the European Union’s Department for Humanitarian Aid, ECHO, the most vulnerable in the provinces most affected by the current food crisis and
- c) To support the post-Covid-19 food and water needs later in the year.”

Ambassador Olkkonen said an already announced top-up of US\$13,5 million to the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund will be partly allocated to strengthening the Covid-19 response, including improving water and sanitation facilities at community level “within a couple of months”.

The Government recently unveiled an \$18 billion Economic Recovery and Stimulus Package aimed at reinvigorating the economy and providing relief to businesses and families impacted by the economic slowdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Under the package, US\$6,8 billion was allocated to agriculture; \$3,02 billion for working capital; \$2,4 billion as food grant; \$2 billion for liquidity and statutory reserves; \$1,5 billion for broad relief measures; \$1 billion each for the health and mining sectors; \$500 million for tourism and \$20 million to the arts sector.

Government recently revealed that it had disbursed nearly \$700 million out of the budgeted \$953 million towards its response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Donations into the National Disaster Fund for Covid-19 had reached US\$3,25 million, R15 million and \$6,24 million as at April 30 while aid and pledges from development partners had reached US\$136 million with the United Kingdom, through the Department for International Development (DFID), making the largest contribution (US\$43 million).

Support for 25 000 farmers

Ambassador Olkkonen said the EU is supporting 25 000 local farmers in all the country’s 10 provinces in partnership with the Zimbabwe Agricultural Growth Programme (ZAGP) to boost productivity.

ZAPG is coordinating programmes such as Beef Enterprise Strengthening and Transformation (BEST), Dairy Value Chain (DVC), Inclusive Poultry Value Chain (IPVC), focus on animal health (SAFE), value chain upgrading for pigs and goats (VALUE) and Zimbabwe Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Services (ZAKIS).

Ambassador Olkkonen said in the EU-funded agriculture and rural development projects, awareness campaigns have been developed on social distancing, targeting field staff and farmers.

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