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ZIMBABWE'S RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS

(COVID-19)

Cabinet received from the Minister of Defence and War Veterans Affairs, Honourable O.C.Z. Muchinguri Kashiri, Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Inter-Ministerial Task Force on the Covid-19 Outbreak, an update on the steps that are being taken to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

The cumulative rapid screening and PCR tests conducted as of 17 August, 2020 are 183 163 (99 651 RDT and 83 51299 (PCR). The country has now five thousand three hundred and eight (5 308) confirmed COVID-19 cases. The cumulative number of confirmed cases has risen by 30% from the previously reported 4 075 to 5 308 positive cases. Cabinet notes with satisfaction that the number of those recovered from COVID-19 has increased by 279% from 1016 to 3 848. Cabinet regrets to note that the number of deaths has risen by 93% from 70 to 135 and advises that no effort is being spared to ensure that the pandemic is contained.

In view of the surge in positive local cases, Cabinet approved Guidelines to help families manage COVID-19 cases at home. Furthermore, in order to curtail the spike in infections Zimbabwe requires a more robust testing regime. In this regard, Cabinet directed that the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education Innovation Science and Technology Development, through the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), works on the production of PCR Primers and Viral Transport media.

In order to strengthen the National COVID-19 response, the following measures will be taken (a) a Technical Steering Committee with experts from all the sectors involved in the response will henceforth be constituted and have clearly defined terms of reference; (b) the COVID-19 response is to be merged into a single response plan comprising the Command Centre, Office of the COVID-19 Chief Coordinator and Ministry of Health and Child Care.

Having noted the plight of the public and the need to lessen the risk of contracting COVID-19, Cabinet directed as follows: (a) that the business hours which were ending at 15:00 hours be revisited to end at 1630 hours and the curfew to be extended to 2000 hours; (b) that Public transport drivers undergo regular COVID-19 PCR tests and (c) that public transport buses be allowed a dedicated lane at roadblocks to expedite their passage.

Cabinet has further directed that immigrants who are PCR negative on arrival will no longer be detained but be put on home quarantine and reviews will be conducted by the Rapid Response Teams in that locality. Those who test positive on arrival will be placed in isolation centres.

Cabinet assures members of the public that measures are being put in place to ensure that health workers return to work, as the success of implementing the COVID-19 response is hinges on the availability of health staff. Acquisition of Protective Personal Equipment (PPE) for health workers and front liners is being prioritized.

Regarding Primary and Secondary Education, Cabinet notes that the sector is continuing with its preparations for the re-opening of schools for final examination classes. The developed and approved guidelines that were put in place for the June 2020 examinations will be used for the holding of the final examinations in November/December.

VISIT TO VICTORIA FALLS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT ON THE LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL TOURISM RECOVERY STRATEGY

The Minister of Environment, Climate and Hospitality Industry briefed Cabinet on His Excellency the President's Visit to Victoria Falls on the 6th of August, 2020 where he launched the National Tourism Recovery and Growth Strategy. During his visit, His Excellency also toured ongoing construction projects in Victoria Falls and officially opened a newly constructed hotel, Mbano Manor Hotel. His Excellency also toured and officially re-opened the Victoria Falls Rainforest, which had been closed for a period of 100 days as part of the National Response Strategy to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

The National Tourism Recovery and Growth Strategy will be anchored on, *inter-alia*, increased investment in tourism related infrastructure; opening up of new tourism development nodes throughout the country targeting such areas like Kanyemba, Binga, Tugwi-Mukosi, Osborne Dam, among others. Entrepreneurs should also develop new products that will encourage tourists to stay longer and spend more. Community participation in the tourism supply chain will also be encouraged.

Cabinet also advises that Government will continue to implement a phased approach in reviving the Tourism Sector, and will keep the public apprised in this regard.

REMODELLING, RECONFIGURING AND RECAPITALISATION OF AGRIBANK PRIVATE LIMITED

Cabinet considered and approved the proposed remodelling of Agribank (Pvt) Limited. This is in view of the fact that agriculture, among other productive sectors, is crucial in realising Vision 2030 owing to its contribution to the economy and to national security. Cabinet noted that the establishment of vibrant and diversified rural financial services which are underwritten by a Land Bank or its equivalent will be an important step which the country should take in order to move towards upper middle income status. This is in view of the realisation that smallholder farmers comprising Communal, Old Resettlement, Small-Scale Commercial and A1 farmers constitute 99 percent of the farming population, holding up to 95 percent of the productive land and owning over 90 percent of the national livestock herd.

Cabinet was informed that the remodeling of Agribank Pvt Limited as a dedicated Land Bank is expected to deliver a number of specific outputs. It will strengthen and diversify existing agricultural and rural financial services for sustainable agrarian reform for accelerated development. The bank will also provide investment support for A1, A2 and small scale commercial farmers (matenganyika) who have not been supported by commercial banks.

It will link currently under-utilised land to structured markets and established value chains supplying factories, supermarkets and export markets and also provide working capital for the construction of agricultural infrastructure as well as for value addition and beneficiation enterprises.

The financial institution will mobilize private sector finance in order to contribute to job creation, food security and social protection in rural communities.

Cabinet agreed in more details as follows: (a) that Agribank be remodelled and re-organised to perform the functions that the Agricultural Finance Corporation used to offer to farmers in the form of short, medium and long-term loans; and (b) that a Task Team comprising the Ministries of Finance and Economic Development (Chair); Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement; and Industry and Commerce; the Attorney-General's Office and the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe be set up to look into the modalities of reconfiguring Agribank into a Land Bank.

4.0 RESTRUCTURING OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND CHILD CARE AS PART OF THE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND REVAMPING OF THE HEALTH SECTOR

The Honourable Vice President C.G.D.N. Chiwenga, as Minister of Health and Child Care presented a report on the ongoing restructuring of the Ministry of Health and Child Care. Government has approved the introduction of four pillars in the health delivery system, namely: Pharmaceuticals and Biopharmaceuticals product manufacturing;

Biomedical Engineering, targeting the manufacturing of ventilators, hospital beds and other essential equipment; Biomedical Science and Laboratory Science, incorporating research on pathogens and the manufacturing of consumables such as reagents; and Public Health Strategy and Guidelines Formulation. The revamping of the Health System is expected to result in robust medical services.

It is expected that the wide ranging reforms will transform the health sector by introducing systems that work in the national interest.

5.0 REPORT ON THE 40TH VIRTUAL SUMMIT OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (SADC)

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade reported on the 40th Summit of SADC which was held on 17th August, 2020 as a virtual meeting. In total, thirteen (13) SADC nations attended the Summit, whose theme was “40 Years Building Peace and Security, and Promoting Development and Resilience in the Face of Global Challenges”. His Excellency the President, Cde E.D. Mnangagwa handed over the chairmanship of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation to his Botswana counterpart, His Excellency President Masisi, while the Chairmanship went to His Excellency President Filipe Nyusi. A face-to-face Summit will be held in March 2021 in Maputo, Mozambique to consider the full SADC agenda.

Cabinet noted with satisfaction that during His Excellency the President’s tenure, Zimbabwe successfully brokered a common SADC

position on troop deployment to the troubled Eastern DRC. The country led a Mission that amicably resolved the border dispute between neighbours Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Zimbabwe led four successful SADC Election Observation Missions to elections in Mozambique, Botswana, Mauritius and Namibia. Through its Ambassador to Malawi, Zimbabwe also proffered advice that contributed to the successful re-run of the Presidential election in Malawi.

Accordingly, Cabinet congratulated His Excellency the President, the Government and the country for a successful chairmanship of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation for the period August 2019 to August 2020.