**THIRTY-SECOND POST-CABINET PRESS BRIEFING**

**21ST SEPTEMBER, 2021**

1. UPDATE ON ZIMBABWE’S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Cabinet received an update on the country’s response to the COVID-19 outbreak, which was presented by the Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, as Deputy Chairperson of the Ad-hoc Inter-Ministerial Task Force on COVID-19.

As of 20 September 2021, Zimbabwe’s cumulative COVID-19 cases stood at 127 938, with 120 946 recoveries and 4 567 deaths. The recovery rate stood at 95%, with 99% of cases being attributable to local transmission. Active cases stand at 2 425.

This week the number of cases recorded went up to 1 669. The education sector contributed significantly to this increase. Government has, therefore, instituted the following measures to contain the COVID-19 surge in schools:

1. enhancement of surveillance and contact-tracing at schools and in the surrounding communities;

2. increasing on-site COVID-19 testing of all suspected cases, contacts and surrounding communities;

3. isolation and management of all COVID-19-positive cases;

4. quarantining of those exposed;

5. restriction of movement into and out of the affected schools until the outbreaks have been controlled;

6. enhancement of public health and social protocols, including social distancing, hand washing, sanitization and wearing of face masks;

7. empowering teachers to detect and report suspected cases;

8. enhancement of awareness campaigns in schools and surrounding communities; and

9. vaccination of all eligible populations in schools and surrounding communities.

The Meeting, however, noted that out of a total school enrolment of 4.6 million, the number of COVID-19-positive cases detected is insignificant. All cases are being well-managed in line with the Standard Guidelines for the Coordinated Prevention and Management of COVID-19 at All Learning Institutions in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, most cases among learners are asymptomatic or have only mild symptoms. Accordingly, Cabinet resolved that schools will remain open. Learners who are isolated will be provided with alternative learning platforms.

Cabinet is pleased to advise that cases in areas previously declared hotspots decreased significantly over the last 21 days and continue declining, due to the effective COVID-19 control measures and protocols put in place by Government. Treasury has also consistently provided the much-needed financial resources for the mitigation measures, with ZW$34.2 billion having been availed so far. These measures have, in general, seen a sustained decrease in the number of people in need of hospitalization for COVID-19, with the country’s hospital bed-occupancy rate decreasing from 6.9% the previous week to 5.6% this week.

2.0 PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PROCUREMENT AND ROLL-OUT OF COVID-19 VACCINES

The Vice President and Minister of Health and Child Care, Honourable C.G.D.N. Chiwenga, apprised Cabinet on progress made in the procurement and roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines.

Cabinet advises the nation that as of 19th September, 2021, a total of 2 949 025 people had received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 2 065 395 their second dose across the country. This translates to a national coverage of 34.7% for the first dose and 24.3% for the second dose. Of special note is that the City of Bulawayo, at 52.6% for the first dose and 40.3% for the second is edging towards herd immunity, along with Matabeleland North where Victoria Falls has already surpassed its herd immunity.

Cabinet wishes to further inform citizens that one million doses of Sinovac vaccine were received on 14th September, 2021. This brings the total number of vaccine doses received since roll-out of the vaccination programme to 11 800 000.

3.0 WHEAT FLOOR PRODUCER PRICE FOR THE 2021 AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SEASON

Cabinet considered and approved proposals for the upward review of the producer price of wheat which was presented by the Minister of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Resettlement, Hon. Dr. Anxious Masuka, as the Acting Chairperson of the Cabinet Committee on Food Security and Nutrition.

The nation is being informed that following a successful wheat season, Zimbabwe is anticipating a volume of more than 300 000 metric tones of the cereal, against a national annual requirement of 360 000 metric tonnes. This is on the backdrop of the current national wheat stocks which stand at 70 000 metric tonnes, making Zimbabwe wheat self-sufficient for the first time since 2005. Following extensiveFor for consultations with various stakeholders, including farmers’ unions, Cabinet has approved an upward review of the wheat floor producer price to ZW$55 517.69 per mt for ordinary grade wheat at a 15% return on investment, and ZW$66 621.22 per mt for premium grade wheat during the 2021 marketing season. This will enable farmers to go back into production.

The upward review of the producer prices is being necessitated by changes in input prices which in turn resulted in higher production costs. Farmers expect viability in their operations, and are grappling with cost increases in Labour (51%); fertilizers, both Compound D and Ammonium Nitrate (27%); and tractor and equipment (144%). The input increases have a net effect of a 32% increase on the total variable cost per hectare. The net contribution of inputs to total wheat production costs in 2021 is as follows:

Labour, 3.19%; seed, 5.14%; fertilizers, 26.15%; chemicals, 3.20%; and operations, 12.37%. The biggest driver of costs is the cost of borrowing which stands at 40%.

A viable producer price will incentivise farmers to deliver their wheat crop to the Grain Marketing Board. The GMB has made adequate preparations for the 2021 wheat intake. Additionally, Government will avail the requisite funds to pay for deliveries. The harvesting of the wheat is expected to commence this week, and should be completed by mid-November 2021.

The nation is also informed that the current subsidy framework to millers will be maintained.

4.0 PRINCIPLES OF THE ELECTRONIC TRANSACTIONS AND ELECTRONIC COMMERCE BILL

Cabinet considered and approved the Principles for the Electronic Transactions and Electronic Commerce Bill, which were presented by the Minister of Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services, Honourable Dr. Jenfan Muswere.

The nation is being informed that the development of information communication technologies in cyberspace requires that the legal and policy environment be adapted to take into account the relevant changes. In particular, there is need for a holistic electronic transaction regulation regime in the face of the opening up of markets and movement of goods and services across borders, and growing incidences of scams and unfair practices, which leave the end-user at risk.

The Electronic Transactions and Electronic Commerce Bill will therefore first and foremost attune the country’s legal framework to technological changes by addressing the current deficiencies in most of the country’s existing laws, which were designed for paper-based transactions. The Bill will promote and advance the business environment in Zimbabwe by establishing a legislative framework that enables fair, accessible, responsible and sustainable online transacting. The Bill will, in whole or in part, consolidate and harmonise existing electronic transactions-related legislation, such as the Consumer Contracts Act [Chapter 8:03].

The key issues provided for by the Bill are the use and regulation of electronic contracts and electronic transactions. The Bill will establish a predictable, accessible, safe and transparent online trading environment, which is necessary for e-commerce to flourish. It will also result in business innovation, while simultaneously empowering consumers supported by well-resourced, effective and efficient regulatory institutions.

5.0 ACTIVITIES TO MARK THE SADC ANTI-SANCTIONS SOLIDARITY DAY: 25 OCTOBER, 2021

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Honourable F.M. Shava, briefed Cabinet on the theme and programme of activities for this year’s SADC Anti-Sanctions Solidarity Day, to be held on 25 October, 2021.

The nation will recall that the 39th SADC Summit, held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in August 2019 designated the 25th of October of each year as the region’s day of solidarity with Zimbabwe against the illegal sanctions imposed by some western nations. While over the years individual countries had supported Zimbabwe in calling for the removal of the sanctions, the anti-sanctions drive by SADC as a region over the past two years has rallied more support for the country, even from non-SADC countries.

Taking note of His Excellency the President’s clarion declaration that “Zimbabwe is a friend to all and an enemy to none”, the theme for this year’s anti-sanctions solidarity day is “Friend to All, Enemy to none: Forging Ahead and Enhancing Innovation and Productivity in Adversity of Sanctions”. The activities to mark the Day will be headlined by His Excellency the President’s Keynote Address, which will be broadcast live across all media platforms.

The negative impact of the sanctions on ordinary Zimbabweans will be highlighted through testimonies from affected businesses and other population groups, including women, the youth and vulnerable groups across all socio-economic sectors. The programmes will be broadcast on all media platforms throughout the month of October, climaxing on 25 October, 2021. The activities will also include engagements of the Diaspora, diplomatic corps and SADC missions. Media briefings, interviews and webinars by Zimbabwean Ambassadors in their areas of accreditation will be conducted, while statements on the sanctions situation will be delivered during bilateral and multilateral meetings.

Buoyed by this solidarity towards Zimbabwe’s cause, Cabinet calls upon all Zimbabweans to play their part in highlighting our plight, given that our friends are in full support of our initiatives towards self-emancipation and attainment of our set Vision 2030. Zimbabwe remains committed to engage and re-engage in its relations with the international community.

6.0 UPDATE ON THE 2021 ZIMBABWE INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR

Cabinet wishes to advise the nation that the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair kicked off in Bulawayo today, with local and international exhibitors participating. A number of high-level engagements will be held at the Fair, including the calendar International Business Conference, which will be led tomorrow by the Vice President and Minister of Health and Child Care, Honourable C.G.D.N. Chiwenga. The Fair will be officially opened by His Excellency the President, Cde Dr. E.D. Mnangangwa, on Thursday 23 September 2021.

I THANK YOU!