

PRESS RELEASE

EU responds to Kofi Annan appeal for Southern Africa

JOHANNESBURG, 26 August 2005 (IRIN) - The European Commission (EC) has announced that it will make available US \$5 million in additional funding for World Food Programme (WFP) aid efforts in Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Swaziland. This ensures that the EU is now covering over 50% of total food commitments to date in Zimbabwe.

The EC had already pledged €20 million (about \$25 million) towards the Regional Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) that started in January this year. This money was made available "in particular to procure and distribute maize and other essential food items to the people of Zimbabwe".

"The EC has now agreed to allocate a further €4.45 million (about \$5 million). Both of these commitments from the EC's food security budget line go a long way to securing the WFP food pipelines until the end of this year," according to the EC Delegation in Harare.

Preliminary results of the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) indicate that an estimated 2.9 million Zimbabweans require food aid this year. As this presumes substantial government food imports, a subsidised maize sale price and wage increases in line with inflation, the number needing food aid may rise. The shortage of food has also been exacerbated by the worsening economic situation in Zimbabwe. Affordability is a major issue.

In Zimbabwe WFP aims to distribute 300,000 tonnes, through a short-term vulnerable group-feeding programme reaching 3 million people and through ongoing school feeding and HIV and AIDS-support activities that target a further one million people. In an interview with IRIN earlier this month WFP country director Kevin Farrell said the agency "faces severe pipeline problems later in the year and in the early months of 2006".

Mr. Farrell went on to say "Thanks to the generous support from donors including the European Commission and EU Member States at the moment we have commitments sufficient for the procurement of 114,000 tonnes for Zimbabwe". Over 50% of this tonnage is covered from EU contributions. Mr Farrell then said "This is sufficient to cover WFP operations until December 2005. However, the balance of 186,000 tonnes will have to be procured to continue our programmes during the peak lean period to April 2006". Mr Farrell warned "without significant new contributions, WFP will be forced to cut back on its distributions next year – leaving many vulnerable people with reduced rations, or no rations at all".

In the context of the overall regional appeal the EC Delegation said this latest contribution "brings the total European Union confirmed commitments (from the EC and Member States) *to over \$52.7 million*. This is equivalent to cover the

procurement and distribution of some 111,000 tonnes of food for the region representing about 41% of total donor pledges to date to the southern Africa appeal”.

The EC Delegation went on to say; “in addition to supporting WFP regionally the EC makes significant commitments to regional food security through the NGO sector and direct with Governments to replenish food security reserves. For 2005 and additional to WFP support the EC and its humanitarian organisation (ECHO) *has made available to the region \$82.60 million through these channels.*

"In committing these funds the European Commission recognises that the food security situation in the region is a cause for serious concern. In particular the needs of Zimbabwe remain critical and that without the direct intervention of the international community a significant proportion of the Zimbabwean population are at serious risk," the EC said.

The EC is pleased to note that the Government of Zimbabwe has already made significant progress in covering the country's food gap and hopes that the Government's ambitious plan to import 1.2 million tonnes can be realised in this marketing year.

The EC Delegation in Harare noted, "The success of any aid intervention will require a spirit of cooperation, openness and understanding between the international community and the Government of Zimbabwe. In this regard it is crucial that a Memorandum of Understanding between WFP and Government, which incorporates international principles in regard to the distribution of humanitarian aid, is finalized and strictly complied with".

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