



**COMMUNIQUE OF THE BUREAU OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE AFRICAN  
UNION (AU) HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT VIDEO  
CONFERENCE WITH AFRICAN BUSINESS LEADERS ON COVID-19,  
HELD ON 22 APRIL 2020**

His Excellency, President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa, and Chairperson of the African Union (AU), convened a video conference Meeting of the AU Bureau of Heads of State and Government with 21 African Business Leaders on 22 April 2020. This was pursuant to the decision of the Bureau held on 3 April 2020 to brief African Business Leaders about the AU strategy to combat COVID-19, and solicit their support for the effective and successful implementation of the strategy.

This was a historic Meeting which brought together Heads of State and Government, and African Business Leaders to reflect on current developments in the Continent, specifically the impact of COVID-19 on African economies, with a view to developing a set of mitigation measures.

The following members of the Bureau of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government participated in the teleconference Meeting: President Félix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo, President Uhuru Kenyatta of the Republic of Kenya, and President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of the Republic of Mali. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt was represented by Foreign Minister Sameh Hassan Shoukry.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, President Paul Kagame of the Republic of Rwanda, President Macky Sall of the Republic of Senegal, and President Emmerson Mnangagwa of the Republic of Zimbabwe participated in the video conference, at the invitation of the Chairperson of the Bureau of the Assembly of AU Heads of State and Government.

The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr Moussa Faki Mahamat, the AU Commissioner for Social Affairs Mrs Amira El Fadil , AU Commissioner for Economic Affairs, Professor Victor Harrison, and the Director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), Dr John Nkengasong, also participated in the video conference.

In his opening remarks, President Ramaphosa briefed the conference about the two previous Meetings of the Bureau since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, held on 26 March and 3 April 2020, respectively. At its Meeting on 26 March 2020, the Bureau decided to establish a continental Solidarity anti-COVID-19 Fund to which Members of the Bureau initially contributed US \$11 million as seed funding and further called on the rest of AU Member States, the international community and philanthropic entities to also contribute to this Fund.

At the same Meeting, Members of the Bureau also agreed to contribute US \$5.5 million to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) in order to reinforce its capacity to support Member States in the fight against COVID-19.

President Ramaphosa informed the Heads of State and Government and Business Leaders that he had undertaken a range of actions including

addressing the virtual Summit of the G20, holding teleconferences with, and writing letters of appeal to numerous world leaders. He also informed the Meeting that together with AU Commission Chairperson, Mr Moussa Faki Mahamat, he addressed a virtual joint meeting of the World Bank and IMF on 17 April 2020. They both urged the international financial institutions to do “whatever it takes” to avoid further human and economic costs from the unprecedented impacts caused by the pandemic. They called for amongst other measures, the allocation of more Special Drawing Rights Allocations (SDRs) to Africa to provide much-needed liquidity to central banks, the corporate sector and SMEs. They also called for the waiver of all interest payments from multilateral and bilateral debt, with view for extension. This would provide the necessary fiscal space for African governments to devote all available resources to response and recovery.

President Ramaphosa and Chairperson Faki also stressed the urgent need for a debt standstill as well as other support measures, that should be extended beyond International Development Association (IDA) countries, which should include both IDA blend and International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) African countries.

President Ramaphosa specifically reiterated the urgent need for the provision of critical medical supplies and equipment, including personal protection equipment (PPEs), sanitizers, and ventilators. In addition to the public health crisis posed by COVID-19, he underscored the devastating socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on African countries, and accordingly, emphasised the need for rapid and concrete support from international partners, to ensure trade and investment flows are not further disrupted by any measures that are not consistent with WTO rules during this extraordinary external global shock.

President Ramaphosa also emphasized the importance of lifting all international sanctions against Zimbabwe and Sudan, in order to provide the necessary space for these fraternal countries to devote their resources to the fight against COVID-19.

President Ramaphosa also informed the Meeting that he has appointed Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala of Nigeria, Dr Donald Kaberuka of Rwanda, Mr Tidjane Thiam of Côte d'Ivoire, and Mr Trevor Manuel of South Africa as Special Envoys of the African Union on COVID-19 to mobilize international financial support for the Continental response strategy. President Ramaphosa also informed the Meeting that he has appointed Mr. Benkhalfa Abderrahmane, a former Minister of Finance of Algeria to join the panel of Special Envoys, and will soon announce the appointment of one more additional Special Envoy, from the Central African region.

The Chairperson of AU Commission, Mr Moussa Faki Mahamat briefed the Meeting on the substantial progress made in operationalising the AU COVID-19 Response Fund, the appointment of a Board of Trustees, including the legal framework outlining the governance and operational structure to ensure the transparency and accountability of the Fund. He also informed the Heads of State and Government and Business Leaders about his consultations with the Chairperson of the Bureau on the recommendation from the Permanent Representatives Council (PRC) of adding two members of the private sector onto the Board of Trustees of the Fund. Mr Faki Mahamat also announced the AU/Africa CDC initiative, the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing (PACT), which is underpinned by - Test and Trace - and aims to increase testing capacity on the Continent for SARS-CoV-2 by 10 million tests in the next 4 months.

The Director of Africa CDC , Dr John Nkengasong, provided the Meeting with an overview of the COVID-19 situation on the continent, highlighting that 24,686 cases of COVID-19 infections had been reported on the Continent and 1,191 people had died from it, while 6,425 had recovered. He noted that since the implementation of lockdowns in African countries, the rates of new infections have slowed dramatically. However, this did not mean that the situation has stabilized, instead it showed that the lockdowns are effective.

Dr Nkengasong further emphasized the important role of the private sector, including of private laboratories to assist with testing, to support with the logistics and transport of samples and materials, to increase local manufacturing of needed materials, and in the deployment of health workers for the implementation of PACT.

The Heads of State and Government and Business Leaders took note of the existential threat faced by the private sector in Africa, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The Heads of State and Government once more welcomed the commitments totaling US \$16,5 million with US \$11 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund, and US \$5.5 million to the Africa CDC, made on 26 March 2020 as follows:

- Egypt - US \$ 6 million, \$4 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$2 million for Africa CDC;
- Kenya - US \$ 3 million, US \$2 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$ 1 million for Africa CDC;

- Mali - US \$1,5 million, US \$1 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$ 500 000 for Africa CDC;
- South Africa - US \$ 6 million, \$4 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$2 million for Africa CDC.

The Heads of State and Government and Business Leaders further welcomed new pledges totaling US \$44,5 million, with US \$12.5 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$32 million for the Africa CDC as follows:

- DRC: US \$4 million, US \$2 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$2 million for Africa CDC;
- Senegal: US \$2 million, US \$1 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$ 1 million for Africa CDC;
- Rwanda: US \$1million, US \$500,000 for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$500,000 for Africa CDC ; and
- Zimbabwe: US \$2 million, US \$1 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$ 1 million for Africa CDC ;
- African Development Bank: US \$26 million, US \$1 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$25 million for Africa CDC;
- Motsepe Foundation: US \$6 million, US \$4 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and US \$2 million for Africa CDC;

- Afreximbank: US \$3 million for the AU COVID-19 Response Fund; and
- Trade and Development Bank of Southern Africa: US \$500 000 for the Africa CDC.

The Heads of State and Government welcomed this positive response which increases the total combined pledges to the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and Africa CDC from US \$16.5 million to US \$61 million.

The Heads of State and Government and Business Leaders expressed their strong support for a two-year debt standstill, as well as a proposal to address private debt.

In order to ensure a coordinated implementation of the Africa COVID-19 response strategy, the Heads of State and Government agreed to convene a Meeting with the Heads of State and Government who chair Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as soon as possible.

The Heads of State and Government encouraged the Business Leaders to establish a private sector platform to develop further proposals to support the Continental response strategy for combatting the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Heads of State and Government and Business Leaders expressed their unwavering support for the World Health Organisation (WHO) in its role in the fight against COVID-19 under the able stewardship of Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The Heads of State and Government and Business Leaders, conveyed their deep gratitude to President Ramaphosa for his inspiring leadership in

coordinating Africa's response to COVID-19. They reaffirmed their commitment to maintain a united, cohesive front in order to defeat the menace of COVID-19.

ENDS.