

The Meaning of the Suspension of EU-Zimbabwe development Co-operation for the People of Zimbabwe.

On the 18th of February 2002, the EU's Council of Foreign Ministers imposed targeted sanctions on Zimbabwe because of the failure of the Zimbabwean Government to prevent the on-going political violence and respect the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the run up to the March presidential election.

At the same time it was also decided to terminate political dialogue under the EU-African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Partnership Agreement, known as the Cotonou Agreement to which Zimbabwe is a signatory and to suspend EU-Zimbabwe development cooperation programmes except those in direct support of the population.

The 'targeted' sanctions take the form of an embargo on the sale, supply or transfer of arms and technical advice, assistance or training related to military activities and an embargo on the sale or supply of equipment which could be used for internal repression in Zimbabwe, as well as a travel ban on persons who engage in serious violations of human rights and of the freedom of opinion, of association and of peaceful assembly in Zimbabwe and a freezing of their funds, other financial assets or economic resources

These targeted sanctions are aimed solely at those whom the EU judges to be responsible for the violence, for the violations of human rights and for preventing the holding of free and fair elections in Zimbabwe.

The suspension of EU development cooperation means in particular, the suspension of the financing of budgetary support to the government and those projects not in direct support of the population and the reorientation of these funds to projects in particular in the social sectors.

The suspension also means that no new agreement with the Zimbabwean government will be signed under the EU-ACP Partnership Agreement in the present circumstances.

However, it should be noted that the EU Ministers expressly provided that contributions to operations of a humanitarian nature will not be affected underlining the commitment of the EU to continue support to the population in Zimbabwe particularly affected by the current economic and food crisis

The suspension of cooperation and other targeted sanctions will only be revoked once conditions prevail which ensure respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law.

At the same time the European Union emphasised its desire to pursue the dialogue with Zimbabwe, on the basis of the ACP-EC Partnership Agreement.

It can be seen therefore that the sanctions were specifically designed not to harm ordinary citizens of Zimbabwe or her neighbors, nor to prevent continuing dialogue between the EU and Zimbabwe to address its economic and other problems.

Background

The EU has been a good friend of Zimbabwe since independence. EU aid accounts for about two-thirds of aid going to Zimbabwe and the EU imports over € 750 million of Zimbabwean goods (Z\$ 38 billion) each year. It has been a friendship based on shared values – faith in democracy and a determination to fight poverty.

When the EU, Zimbabwe and the other African, Caribbean and Pacific countries signed the Cotonou Agreement in 2000, all said in Article 9 that respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law should underpin all our policies. This was a reaffirmation of shared beliefs that are the basis of the partnership.

Over several months prior to the suspension, the European Union had been asking the government of Zimbabwe to show us that it was willing to abide by the principles of democracy and human rights that it signed up to in Cotonou. Unfortunately, it chose not to do so and this is clearly evidenced by the continued degradation of the political and economic environment.

Those who continue to suggest that the EU has acted in this matter as if it considered itself in some way superior, as though it wished to push Zimbabwe around, are missing a crucial point.

The EU enters into agreements with its partners as equals. The rules of Cotonou apply to the EU as much as to any of the African signatories. If they have concerns about EU conduct, they can use the same procedures to voice them.

Present situation and perspective

In fact the greater part of the present EU-Zimbabwe co-operation is already directed at providing direct support to the population and is therefore unaffected by the GAC decision.

A total of approximately 78 million Euro are at present being spent in the area of health, for purchase of basic drugs; in the education sector for support for school improvement grants in deprived districts and for micro-projects and decentralised co-operation projects presented by and directly implemented community groups themselves.

The main area affected by the suspension are those elements of current programmes that provided direct support for capacity-building and policy reform in Government ministries or constitute direct budgetary support to the government.

These funds amount to approximately 58 Million Euro and the EU is at present in discussion with the government on how best to reallocate them to the above mentioned types of activities in direct support for the population and to help fill the large humanitarian needs currently facing the population.