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International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Contributes COVID-19 Testing and Detection kits to Zambia

Lusaka, 30 July 2020: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has contributed to the Government of the Republic of Zambia's efforts to fight against COVID-19 by building national capacities to diagnose the virus using real time Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) for the testing and rapid detection of COVID-19 through support from the United States Government. The donation follows a request made by the Ministry of Higher Education for IAEA to support Zambia with testing kits.

Speaking during a virtual handover ceremony on 29 July 2020, Ministry of Higher Education Permanent Secretary Ms Kayula Siame noted that the equipment will support Zambia's COVID-19 response.

"When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in Zambia, as Government we reached out to the IAEA for support and are grateful to the IAEA and the American Government for the provision of the equipment which includes scanners, centrifuge sample extraction kits and accessories. The equipment will go a long way as part of our multisectoral approach to fighting the pandemic," said Ms Siame.

In a vote of thanks, Ministry of Health Permanent Secretary for Technical Services Dr. Kennedy Malama expressed gratitude to the IAEA, the United Nations system and the United States Government for supporting the COVID-19 response in Zambia. He said that the equipment would enhance Zambia's capacity to detect and manage COVID-19.

"As you know with COVID-19 you can only manage that which you know. This donation comes at the right time when we need to ramp up our testing for COVID-19. IAEA has been a strategic partner in diagnostic services, training and research in Zambia," said Dr Malama.

United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Chief of Laboratory and Infrastructure Support in Zambia Dr Samuel Yingst said that the donation was part of the US Government's partnership with the Zambian Government in the health sector.

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“CDC has provided substantial support in the area of diagnostics as an extension of years of collaboration with Zambia. We appreciate the opportunity for future collaboration. We pledge to work diligently with the ministries of Health and Higher Education to help to utilize this donation and bring our collaborative human resources to bare in the best possible way to counter this disease,” said Dr Yingst.

Meanwhile, World Health Organisation Representative to Zambia Dr Nathan Bakayita who spoke on behalf of the UN Resident Coordinator Dr. Coumba Mar Gadio, acknowledged the Zambian Government’s commitment to fighting COVID-19 and pledged the United Nation’s continued support in the response.

“I wish to acknowledge the Government of Zambia’s leadership and commitment in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, a matter on which the UN remains available to support whenever needed,” Dr Bakayita said.

Dr Bakayita said that the UN support to the COVID-19 response in Zambia included working with the Government to develop a multisectoral contingency and response plan, cash grants to vulnerable people, Risk Communication and Community Engagement, upgrading water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, nutrition, food security and education.

And IAEA Director, Division for Africa Mr. Shaukat Abdulrazak who represented the IAEA Director General Mr. Rafael Grossi, said that the IAEA received requests for assistance from 42 African countries in fighting COVID-19.

“I am happy to report that we have so far delivered RT-PCR and other equipment to over 28 Member States in Africa out of the 42 that have requested for support. Other equipment is in the process of being procured and shipped. Zambia is receiving one set today and the second one is on the way. We express our gratitude to the Government of the United States of America for ensuring that this support is made possible. IAEA will continue to support Zambia and other African Member States to address their priority development needs through the peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology,” said Mr. Abdulrazak.

The first case of COVID-19 in Zambia was recorded on 18 March 2020. As at 29 July 2020, Zambia had 5,249 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 138 deaths. The Government of the Republic of Zambia is in partnership with cooperating partners implementing a multisectoral response to the pandemic.

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