EU supports strengthening of rule of law and access to justice for all

The European Union today launched three new projects that reaffirm its commitment to strengthening the rule of law and to making justice more accessible for all Zimbabweans. In total, the EU provides EUR 2.85 million (approx. USD 3.54 million) for the interventions.

The projects are financed from the 11th European Development Fund and are the first building blocks of a new, more comprehensive programme in support of "justice for all" of EUR 12 million (approx. USD 14.9 million) which will be rolled out over the next months. They will be implemented by three long-standing partners of the European Union in Zimbabwe.

- The Judicial Services Commission through the International Commission for Jurists will receive EUR 1.85 million for their project titled “Strengthening the Rule of Law in Zimbabwe and protection of human rights for all”. Over 36 months, the Judicial Service Commission will be supported with capacity building measures for Judges, magistrates, court researchers, court clerks and other justice sector actors, to enhance the independence, accountability, competence and integrity of the judiciary.

- A support programme for the customary courts will be implemented by the Chiefs Council in partnership with the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) with EUR 500 000. Over 30 months, the LRF will work with Judicial officers in traditional courts, mainly chiefs, headmen, clerks of court, assessors and messengers in order to enhance access to gender-sensitive, human rights-oriented and correct procedural justice by court users in traditional courts.

- The third project focusses on supporting the role of lawyers in improving justice delivery, especially for indigent people facing capital offences as well as electoral and constitutional justice and will be implemented by the Law Society of Zimbabwe (LSZ) over 30 months with EUR 500 000.

Speaking at the launch of all three projects this afternoon in Harare, Ambassador Philippe Van Damme, Head of the EU Delegation to Zimbabwe, said: "I am encouraged by the fact that the ongoing political dispensation found the JSC, the LSZ and other justice actors on the right footing and in the
right direction towards implementing reforms. Even at a time when there was only limited political will to implement constitutional reforms, you all tried to improve justice delivery and remained resolute under less favourable conditions. I urge you to continue the hard work with renewed vigour and determination for the rule of law to prevail and for the people to enjoy the quality justice they deserve."

The principle of the rule of law and respect for human rights corresponds to the basic values on which the EU is based. Since 2010, the EU has been supporting institutional reforms to ensure access to justice for all through strengthening the independence, impartiality and professionalism of the judiciary and other justice actors. Following the adoption of the 2013 Constitution, the EU continued to support institutional reforms in the justice sector to fully comply with it.

The three projects launched today are funded from the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) and are part of the National Indicative Programme (NIP), jointly agreed between the European Union and the Government of Zimbabwe and signed in February 2015. The NIP, amounting to EUR 234 million has three focal areas, namely Health, Agriculture and Governance and institution building, under which EUR 18,7 million are earmarked for the justice sector, parliamentary support and support to constitutional alignment.

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