

What's inside

OSISA helps Zim fight COVID-19

BULAWAYO-As part of a multi-faceted effort to combat the growing menace of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Zimbabwe, the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) recently...

PAGE 1

Malunga's remarks during the handover

It is my honour and privilege to participate in this ceremony to handover personal protective and hospital equipment to the second largest infectious disease hospital in Zimbabwe...

PAGE 2

"It's no time to relax" - Neube

It is a big privilege for me to join you this morning in the spirit of partnership and goodwill. I first want to commend His Excellency the President Cde. ED Mnangagwa...

PAGE 3

OSISA helps Zim fight COVID-19

BULAWAYO- As part of a multi-faceted effort to combat the growing menace of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Zimbabwe, the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) recently donated equipment worth more than US\$80 000 to Bulawayo's Thorngrove Infectious Disease Hospital.

It was a timely donation as the council-run hospital had just turned one of its wings into an isolation unit for COVID-19 patients when OSISA delivered the equipment.

The equipment included resuscitation trolleys, tables and chairs, medical gloves, medical gowns and intravenous drip rod drops.

Thorngrove Infectious Disease Hospital became the latest beneficiary of OSISA's drive towards fighting COVID-19. Before Thorngrove Infectious Disease Hospital, OSISA donated equipment to Mutare Infectious Diseases Hospital run by the local council.

OSISA has invested over US\$6 million in 12 southern African countries as part of a multi-dimensional approach to responding to the effects of the crisis in the SADC region, said OSISA Executive Director Siphosami Malunga.

"These investments have included but not limited to critical investments in information dissemination in awareness raising around the pandemic and how to prevent it, strengthening access to testing for all, mitigating social and economic effects of the pandemic particularly for those living in the margins of society," said Malunga at the handover ceremony of the equipment donated to Thorngrove Infectious Disease Hospital.

Zimbabwe has recorded more than 38 000 confirmed cases of coronavirus including 36 371 recoveries and 1 583 deaths while a total of 600 579 people have been vaccinated against the virus.

Authorities in the troubled southern African country, where a once vibrant public health system is now in the intensive care unit, say they are bracing for a third wave of infections as the country inches towards the winter season amid fears of deadlier and more infectious variants of the virus.

Hospital equipment is only part of the support provided by OSISA, said Malunga.

"Our interventions have sought to reach vulnerable groups affected by the pandemic including the youth, the elderly, healthcare and front line workers and people living with disabilities, women, informal traders, human rights defenders, investigative journalists and LGBTI communities and the teaching community," said Malunga.

He added: "The investments have been varied and targeted a whole range of activities through the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights and the nurses. OSISA has supported in the provision of material and technical support, PPE, oxygen, fluid and antibiotics to four health facilities and their health workers strengthening community awareness and prevention and control of COVID-19

Continued on Page 2



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Some of the medical equipment donated to Thorngrove Infectious Disease Hospital in Bulawayo.



Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) Executive Director Mr Siphosami Malunga remarks during the handover of hospital equipment to Thorngrove Infectious Diseases Hospital in Bulawayo

It is my honour and privilege to participate in this ceremony to handover personal protective and hospital equipment to the second largest infectious disease hospital in Zimbabwe, Thorngrove Hospital.

This is not the first time my organisation has collaborated in support of PPE. This is the second such large support. Earlier, we supported the Mutare Infectious Diseases Hospital in 2020.

On 11 March 2020 the World Health Organisation declared the noble coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic and since then massive negative impacts have been witnessed around the globe.

A surge on confirmed cases running up to over 2 million deaths globally, a severe strain on the public health systems of many countries globally including the inability to cope and respond to the pandemic effectively.

Over the course of 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic forced governments to enter into a crisis and emergency mode with the recurrent ordering of national shutdowns or lockdowns as they are commonly known.

There has been curfews, travel restrictions and bans on public gatherings as well as shutdown of industries including aviation industry, tourism, restaurants, schools and including beverages alcohol and restaurants globally.

This was coupled by other social and public health restrictions and regulations in an attempt to curb the spread of the coronavirus. These strict measures also resulted in severe economic, social, educational, psychological consequences for millions of citizens across our region but also beyond.

Economies have been highly impacted and inequalities of all types have been deepened and aggravated by this pandemic. Of further concern has been the increase in the violation of fundamental human rights and unjustified limitations of freedoms by a number of countries in our region but also beyond under the guise of enforcing COVID-19 public health and emergency regulations and measures.

Noting this dire and untenable situation, the Open Society Foundations globally released the sum of US\$130 million to support countries globally to respond to coronavirus. The Open Society Initiative in Southern Africa took a multi-dimensional approach to responding to the effects of the crisis in our region in Southern Africa. In total, OSISA released and invested over US\$6 million dollars in Southern Africa in 12 SADC countries.

These investments have included but not limited to critical investments in information dissemination in awareness raising around the pandemic and how to prevent it, strengthening access to testing for all, mitigating social and economic effects of the pandemic particularly for those living in the margins of society.

Providing support to investigative journalism to spotlight excesses including governments excesses and mismanagement of funds, health funds during this crisis fighting for information related to this pandemic and also calling and supporting transparency and accountability for human rights implications related to responses related to this pandemic.

Our interventions have sought to reach vulnerable groups affected by the pandemic including the youth, the elderly, healthcare and front line workers and people living with disabilities, women, informal traders, human rights defenders, investigative journalists and LGBTI communities and the teaching community.

Zimbabwe, because of its geographical location and proximity to South Africa has seen a rise in the number of infections amid the detection of the new COVID-19 variant and the rise of the second wave of infections. As of 22 February 2021, Zimbabwe had recorded 30 796 confirmed cases.

The country positivity COVID-19 rate are on the rise as estimated at 30% meaning 1 in 3 people have tested positive over the past few weeks meaning that is higher than the first wave and higher than the World Health Organisation recommended rate of less than 10%.

The positivity rate is a clear indication that the virus is in the community. It has reached the community now and it is inside the community. Researchers have reported that the recovery rate of 95%

since the national lock down has since plummeted to around 58% and 60%. To date, OSISA has invested support of short to medium term advocacy research service delivery related interventions in the country.

The investment has been varied and targeted a whole range of activities through the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights and the nurses. OSISA has supported in the provision of material and technical support, PPE, oxygen, fluid and antibiotics to four health facilities and their health workers strengthening community awareness and prevention and control of COVID-19 capacity measures development providing psychological support to health care workers and mobilising and organising nurses to support their protection in the health work place.

We have partnered with media organisations to coordinate the dissemination of credible information around the COVID-19 pandemic including on infection and the way in which to prevent the spread of this virus. We have supported the provision of protective tools and equipment for journalists working on covering the pandemic as well as for artists working to showcase the effect and highlight of the pandemic as well as raise awareness about it.

We have worked with the teaching community to support teachers to make the teaching work space safe and to push for conditions for education facilities that are safe from COVID-19 pandemic.

We have also worked with nurses associations and have worked with healthcare workers pushing for a safe workplace related to prevention and response to COVID-19. In addition, we have worked with human rights organisations providing support in the wake of a surge in human rights violations in responding and enforcing COVID-19.

Some of the human rights organisations we have worked with have supported the litigation in relation to ensuring that the government and other responsible authorities meet their obligations towards not just citizens but health care workers.

The use of arts has been critical in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have provided support to arts and media to document and raise awareness to the challenges faced by young women, persons with disabilities and as well as marginalised groups in order to ensure that attention is paid by government and other responsible authorities in response to the pandemic.

It has been notable and I will mention that we collaborated with Intwasa Arts Festival last year and Cultivate Africa in 2020. Finally, we have worked with local authorities and health facilities across the country.

As I indicated earlier, we provided support to Mutare Infectious Diseases Hospital last year and this year we have provided support to Thorngrove Infectious Diseases Hospital via this donation of 30 hospital beds, mattresses, 10 intensive care beds, intravenous drip rods, trolleys tables, chairs, cardiac tables and medical gloves and gowns for nurses, doctors and other healthcare workers.

We believe and hope that our support will go a long way in saving lives in complimenting the efforts of the government and other non state actors all of whom are actively involved in helping fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

We applaud all these efforts and call upon governments to please ensure that as they respond to the pandemic they ensure that human rights are protected and guaranteed and if possible even expanded given the fact that the pandemic has resulted in the restriction of rights.

I would like to thank the Mayor once again, Honourable Minister Ncube and of course the councilors and the director of health for this opportunity and I wish you all well and I hope that we will be ready and readier to fight the pandemic as we go forward.



For a worthy cause... OSISA Executive Director Siphosami Malunga says his organisation is committed to help combat the spread of coronavirus

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Continued from Page 1

capacity measures development providing psychological support to health care workers and mobilising and organising nurses to support their protection in the health work place.”

The interventions by OSISA also include support to information dissemination services that are vital in raising awareness and also exposing corruption that may result in much needed resources being diverted by greedy politicians and officials.

“We have provided support to investigative journalism to spotlight excesses including government excesses and mismanagement of funds, health funds during this crisis fighting for information related to this pandemic and also calling and supporting a transparency and accountability for human rights implications related to responses related to this pandemic,” said Malunga.

“It’s no time to relax” - Ncube

It is a big privilege for me to join you this morning in the spirit of partnership and goodwill. I first want to commend His Excellency the President Cde. Mnangagwa and his administration for their leadership and decisive action during this difficult time.

The Government of Zimbabwe’s early and ongoing response to the COVID-19 crisis has been robust. The challenges we face today require continued cooperation between our government, donors, the business community, the private sector and get civil society.

Today’s handover of hospital equipment and health products has been made possible by the generosity of the Open Society Institute of Southern Africa this donation institutes critical to Bulawayo’s response to COVID-19 as the equipment will help save many lives.

On behalf of the President His Excellency Cde ED Mnangagwa, the people of Bulawayo and on my own behalf, I am very grateful and I would like to thank the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa who saw it fit to donate towards this worthy

cause. The government recognises the work they are doing in the fight against COVID-19.

It is my hope that the support will go a long way in the management and treatment of COVID-19 cases in Bulawayo. As I close, let me restate that COVID-19 is real, COVID-19 is here although in our communities citizens are generally becoming less cautious and not fully adhering to prevention measures.

I am once again appealing to the people of Bulawayo that let us heighten our vigilance as we have many examples across the world of how confirmed cases can rise quickly and overwhelm the system and undermine our collective good work.

This is not time to relax but time to increase our adherence to the guidelines we have been given by the World Health Organisation and the Ministry of Health and Childcare. Together we shall overcome COVID-19. Together we can make it.

Judith Ncube is Minister of State for Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.



OSISA donation to aid in uplifting human rights - Mguni

The City of Bulawayo is grateful to be today receiving this big consignment of state of the art hospital equipment and essential health care products towards the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The number of cases that have been recorded in the city and in the country have been increasing since reports of the first COVID-19 case in the country a year ago.

The pandemic posed a number of challenges for health care workers and government alike. The challenges which were faced by the City of Bulawayo and many other local authorities was the availability of enough hospital beds and equipment to cater for the increasing number of cases.

There have been several efforts to curb the increasing number of cases, with the recent lockdown and inoculation of the COVID-19 vaccine as some of the measures.

While the lockdown has been lifted we continue to urge the residents to stay at home, wash hands frequently with soap under running water and exercise physical distancing. The battle against COVID-19 will be won when we all join in the fight together.

The unity of purpose is shown through the various partners that have come on board to assist council in ensuring we had enough personal protective clothing and hospital equipment to cater for the admitted and patients at home.

These partnerships have sustained the city for the past year and they continue to do so. Today, we receive this donation from OSISA also at a time when we have opened the refurbished Thorngrove isolation ward for admission of COVID-19 patients. It is a shot in the arm for the City of Bulawayo, the province and the residents of this great City of Kings.

We receive the state of the art hospital beds, equipment and personal protective clothing for the health care staff which will ensure that the patients admitted at the hospital have the greatest comfort.

The consignment is key in ensuring that we provide quality health services for the City of Bulawayo which is important in the



Bulawayo Mayor Solomon Mguni

upholding of human rights. Ladies and gentlemen, may I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the OSISA team ably led by Mr Siphosami Malunga for their efforts and hard work in ensuring that we receive this donation as Bulawayo and in joining the city’s

fight against COVID-19 pandemic. May this partnership that has been forged continue in the upliftment of the rights of the people of Bulawayo and in ensuring efficient service delivery in all spheres, becomes our priority. **Mguni is Mayor of City of Bulawayo.**

