

Zimbabwe sanctions lifted after decades, aid to resume

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(GIN) - European Union ministers have agreed to immediately lift a decade of punishing sanctions against Zimbabwe. The move will help improve the country's image as the unity government prepares for elections.

Pictured: Zimbabwe tobacco farmers.

The decision was welcomed by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, a longtime critic of President Robert Mugabe. "My preference remains a full lifting of the measures," he said. He urged Australia to make a similar move.

Tsvangirai added: "There was a time when any restrictive measure (was) an incentive for good behavior but I think that we are past that....suspend these measures but tie them to free and fair elections and if the election is free and fair, fine...remove them permanently."

Sanctions were imposed following the confiscation of lands held by white farmers and redistributed to blacks. They included travel bans and the freezing of financial assets, funds, and other economic resources linked to Mugabe and members of his cabinet and military.

The U.S. appears to be the lone holdout, with outgoing US ambassador Charles Ray saying that Washington would only lift sanctions against President Robert Mugabe and his inner circle if polls are held peacefully.

In a separate development, the New York Times surprised many readers with a piece saying that the land seizures had actually spurred more black Zimbabweans into tobacco farming. In a story titled "In Zimbabwe Land Takeover, a Golden Lining", the author quotes a tobacco auctioneer: "You used to only see white faces here.... "Now it is for everybody. It is a beautiful sight."