

European Union supports Iranian and Venezuelan bids for IMF COVID-19 funds



Brussels, March 24 (RHC)-- Foreign ministers of the European Union supported Monday Iranian and Venezuelan requests for financial aid to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

"We are going to support this request because these countries are in a very difficult situation mainly due to the U.S. sanctions that prevent them from having income by selling their oil," EU Foreign Affairs Chief Josep Borrell said at a virtual press conference following a teleconference with EU foreign affairs ministers.

Both countries are under U.S. sanctions and have recently asked the IMF for emergency funding of \$5 billion each. Last week, the IMF said it had allocated US\$50 billion for countries struggling with the outbreak.

The IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has stated that "countries affected by #COVID19 (coronavirus) will be supported via Rapid Financial Instrument. Our Central Bank requested access to this facility immediately", Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a tweet on March 12.

Similarly, Venezuela requested the funds but it was rejected because according to an IMF spokesperson there was "no clarity" among its 189 member states on who it recognizes as Venezuela's rightful leader: democratically elected President Maduro or U.S.-backed lawmaker Juan Guaido.

These resources were meant to strengthen the response capacities of the Venezuelan health system in the containment of COVID-19, as the system has been heavily battered by illegal U.S. sanctions. "We believe in these situations it has to be reaffirmed that humanitarian trades, goods that can be delivered to these countries on a humanitarian level – it means agri-food. It means medicine. It means medical products are not on the American sanctions," the diplomat assured.

Meanwhile, the EU is preparing to send more than \$20 million worth of humanitarian aid to Iran. Borrell said that such support was not in breach of the U.S. sanctions.

As of Monday, Health Ministry spokesman Kianush Jahanpoor told reporters that the country has confirmed 1,411 new cases of coronavirus infections, bringing the total number of cases to over 23,000.

While Venezuela has reported only 77 cases, mainly due to strict quarantine and quick government response.

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