



As Africa unites to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, we also pin our hopes on the AU Peace Fund to silence the guns, Daily Maverick, by Naledi Pandor, 4 February 2021

African countries agree that the most important public health measure to prevent COVID-19 is the roll-out of vaccines. Also key is that they are rolled out in a fair and equitable manner – all countries must get them and get them speedily.

In the past year of South Africa's chairing of the African Union (AU), the continental organisation has been grappling with managing the spread and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic while implementing one of its flagship projects, the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA).

The pandemic has had severe effects on AU member countries, but it has also united them in a manner reminiscent of the solidarity that the Organisation of African Unity, the AU's predecessor, led against apartheid South Africa.

African countries agree that the most important public health measure to prevent COVID-19 is the roll-out of vaccines. For the past year efforts have been under way to find vaccines that are safe, affordable and effective. Also important is that vaccination be rolled out in a fair and equitable manner.

All countries must get vaccines and must get them speedily. It is vital to the global containment of COVID-19 that vaccination takes place in all countries and among all populations. We are all aware of the challenges of accessing vaccines for developing countries, particularly in Africa.

South Africa, India and other like-minded countries have called on the World Trade Organisation to temporarily waive specific intellectual property obligations related to the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 for a defined period and within defined parameters.

This would enable countries in Africa and elsewhere to access active pharmaceutical ingredients and benefit from technology transfer, including the know-how to manufacture vaccines in Africa at a cheaper cost.

Notwithstanding the pandemic, we also had to ensure the AU continues to execute its agreed reform agenda effectively. The implementation phase of the AfCFTA began on 1 January 2021, making history as Africa became the world's largest free trade area. Through the AfCFTA, the

continent will eliminate trade barriers, enhance competitiveness and stimulate investment, innovation and economic growth.

Also important for our chairing of the AU has been the goal to silence guns on the continent. The financing of peace operations in Africa has been a challenge for years. The civil society organisation Accord said the AU's reliance on foreign donors creates "a very strong interdependence and a subordinate role for African countries in decision-making". That is why, in 2016, the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government decided to establish the AU Peace Fund.

The Peace Fund was established under Article 21 of the protocol establishing the Peace and Security Council of the AU to finance the AU's peace and security operations. The fund covers operational activities: mediation and preventive diplomacy, institutional capacity and peace support operations.

AU member states have set themselves the target to capitalise the Peace Fund up to \$400-million in 2021. This will be a demonstration of Africa's commitment to ensuring predictable and sustainable financing for peace and security activities.

As President Cyril Ramaphosa told an AU meeting recently, the continent's failure to implement its own decisions as a result of financial inadequacies "diminishes our ability to consolidate peace, prevent the recurrence of violent conflict, build social cohesion, deepen democracy and advance economic development". DM

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation