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Diplomats—EU to Extend Sanctions on Zimbabwe

By Reuters

BRUSSELS — The European Union (EU) is set to extend sanctions on Zimbabwe for another year including an arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze on President Robert Mugabe and other top officials, EU diplomats say.

The 27-member bloc, which accuses Harare of widespread human rights violations, plans to go ahead with the move despite the risk that the travel ban on Mugabe could again scupper longstanding plans for an EU-Africa summit, they say.

The list of visa bans and freezing of assets includes more than a hundred ministers and officials.

The EU accuses them of human rights violations, and violations of freedom of speech and assembly in Zimbabwe.

"They will be prolonged for another year," an EU diplomat said of existing sanctions due to expire on February 20.

"Every year the European Commission does a report on the situation in Zimbabwe, it has not changed so the conclusions are the same," another official at the EU executive said.

The sanctions were initially triggered by the controversial distribution of white-owned commercial farms to mainly landless blacks and Mugabe's disputed re-election in 2002.

Critics say the seizures have destroyed Zimbabwe's economy, turning the country from a regional agricultural leader to a nation barely able to feed itself amid a deepening crisis marked by food and fuel shortages and inflation above 1,200 per cent.

Mugabe says the sanctions are responsible for Zimbabwe's economic crisis and he says his land policy was necessary because former colonial power Britain did not make good on promises at the time of Zimbabwe's independence in 1980.

Eldred Masunungure, chairman at University of Zimbabwe's Political Science Department, said the EU sanctions have failed to reach their objective and have if anything hit the population of Zimbabwe.

"I think the sanctions by their very nature are a blunt instrument and their impact tends to spread beyond the target persons," Masunungure said.

"On the government's side they have been felt but as you can see Mugabe has not changed his policies."

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