6 September, 2021

Addis Ababa, 6 September 2021 (ECA) - The government of Ethiopia has received its first monthly shipment of the Johnson and Johnson (J&J) single-shot vaccine purchased through the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT). The 108,000 doses were handed over to health minister, Lia Tadesse, at the Bole International Airport on 6 September.

Ms. Tadesse said she was “pleased to receive the first consignment of the 3 million doses of J&J vaccines” procured by her government through AVAT, stating “this will boost our national COVID-19 vaccination programme.”

The delivery is part of the historic COVID-19 vaccine advance procurement agreement signed on 28 March 2021 by AVAT for the purchase of 220 million doses of J&J vaccine, with the potential to order an additional 180 million doses.

Minister Tadesse expressed her gratitude to all AVAT partners - African Union, Africa CDC, Afreximbank, the World Bank, and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) - for supporting Africa’s fight against COVID-19.

“AVAT is not only about vaccine acquisition. It’s also a platform for collaboration with different partners to enhance local manufacturing. This is very important to us as we work on improving our manufacturing sector in Ethiopia,” said Ms Tadesse.

The AVAT procurement marks the first time African Union Member states have collectively purchased vaccines to safeguard the health of the African population. In total, 400 million vaccines acquired through AVAT are sufficient to immunise a third of the African population.

Ms Tadesse acknowledged ECA “for supporting us on many fronts,” especially through the AfCFTA-anchored Pharma Initiative, which advocates for pooled procurement and local manufacturing in Africa’s pharmaceutical sector.
“It’s a great initiative that we hope will continue to grow and improve access to safe medicines and vaccines in our efforts to achieve universal health coverage,” she said.

Africa CDC’s director, Dr John Nkengasong, who officially handed over the vaccines said AVAT’s goal is to ensure that Africa gets enough vaccines to reach, at least, the 60% immunisation target.

“What makes AVAT unique is that it is an African initiative for Africans,” said Dr Nkengasong, adding “we see Africans stepping up to take their own health security into their hands and the governments are putting their own taxpayer money on the table with support from Afreximbank and World Bank.”

ECA’s Acting director for Gender, Poverty and Social Policy, Edlam Yemeru, said she was “delighted to see African Member States joining hands to address a common challenge” through AVAT, which she described as a “major milestone” in Africa’s effort to ensure its health security.

“This clearly demonstrates that local production of essential medicines and vaccines is possible. It also shows the power of pooled procurement of pharmaceutical products as envisaged in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA),” said Ms Yemeru.

Ms Yemeru pointed out that “the AfCFTA will provide African countries with even more opportunities to boost local production of pharmaceutical products and create millions of jobs,” and that ECA remains committed to working with member states and partners to secure Africa’s health security and, by implication, Africa’s prosperity.

Doina Petrescu, Operations Manager at World Bank Ethiopia, congratulated Ethiopia’s ministry of health for leading the national vaccination programme in partnership with COVAX and AVAT. She said, “since the beginning of COVID-19 the World Bank has provided Ethiopia with close to $300 million to fight the pandemic” and strengthen its health systems.

“The World Bank assures its partners of its commitment to continue providing financial and technical support to fight COVID-19,” said Ms Petrescu.

The agreement with Johnson & Johnson was made possible through a USD 2 billion facility provided by African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), who are also the Financial and Transaction Advisers, Guarantors, Instalment Payment facility providers and Payment Agents. The ECA provided technical support on the financing arrangements and on alignment of the African Union Ministers of Finance. UNICEF, in collaboration with the Africa Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP), is providing logistical and delivery services to the Member States.

AVAT was established by the African COVID-19 Vaccine Acquisition Task Team, set up in November 2020 under the African Union chairmanship of H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa, as part of the African Union’s
COVID-19 Vaccine Development and Access Strategy, and its goal of vaccinating at least 60 per cent of the African population with safe and efficacious vaccines against COVID-19.

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