Beat: Business

VIRGIN ATLANTIC And VIRGIN UNITE FLY CRUCIAL MEDICAL SUPPLIES INTO AFRICA

BY DONATING A SPECIAL CARGO FLIGHT

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USPA NEWS - Virgin Group, Virgin Atlantic, and Virgin Unite ““ the Virgin Group's not-for-profit Foundation ““ are supporting UNICEF and the World Food Programme-led Global Common Supply Chain Services Provision by donating a special cargo flight from Hong Kong (HKG) to Johannesburg (JNB), delivering essential PPE equipment for frontline health workers into Eswatini and Mozambique.

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The flight, which departed Hong Kong on Thursday (18 June) and travelled via London Heathrow (LHR) arrived on June 23, carrying almost half a million items of PPE including masks, gowns, goggles and face shields procured by UNICEF to support the governments of Eswatini and Mozambique in their fight against COVID-19. Distribution of all items was managed by the Ministries of Health in each country to ensure the PPE reaches the areas and individuals in greatest need to help beat this pandemic.

Sir Richard Branson said: "We're very proud to be working with a collective of philanthropists and partners like UNICEF to support the African response to COVID-19. Life-saving protective equipment is critical to contain the spread of this pandemic and we hope our contribution will make a difference to those working so hard on the frontlines every day."

Dominic Kennedy, Managing Director of Virgin Atlantic Cargo commented: "We're honoured to be able to support UNICEF and Virgin Unite on this important cargo operation and are incredibly grateful to medical professionals who are working tirelessly at this difficult time. Today's flight follows existing PPE flights we've undertaken in partnership with the Department of Health and NHS to transport vital medical supplies. So far, we've carried more than 1.4million tonnes of medical equipment and PPE and we look forward to flying more throughout the summer."

COVID-19 cases are rising in Africa, from 100,000 confirmed cases at the end of May to more than 276,000 confirmed cases as of 19 June.

This news follows last week's launch of the Africa Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP) - an online platform for African countries to manage global procurement of life-saving medical equipment more fairly and cost effectively. This unique platform is an example of how important collaboration, not just across one country, but across an entire continent, is going to be in combatting this global pandemic. The site was developed under the leadership of philanthropist and African Union COVID-19 special envoy, Strive Masiyiwa, working in partnership with the African Union.

Virgin Group supported this effort through a local manufacturing initiative with South African company, Invicta Holdings. Invicta is producing 1,000 bridge ventilators, designed by engineers at Virgin Orbit who provided the designs for free, to be followed by the production of oxygen helmet prototypes (pending a grant of emergency use authorisation by the US FDA) designed by Virgin Galactic and The Spaceship Company. Both items will be distributed on the AMSP, thanks to the generosity of Jeff Skoll and Strive Masiyiwa whose donations secured the initial orders.

Strive Masiyiwa said: "We developed the Africa Medical Supply Platform as a centralised online marketplace to house all certified PPE and COVID-related medical suppliers from Africa and around the world. It enables health ministries from all African countries to organize procurement, payment and shipment of these urgent goods. It is designed to ensure fair and consistent pricing for each African country, no matter their size. AMSP is a world-leading solution to a very current global challenge, and we are already getting requests for other parts of the world to license the AMSP concept."

Access to freight capacity across the continent of Africa is critical right now to ensure medical equipment can flow to the places where

it is needed the most. We encourage anyone who can provide support to contact The World Food Programme https://emergency.servicemarketplace.wfp.org/about-us and Airlink - https://airlinkflight.org/responses/novel-coronavirus/

Another critical area for support is to increase the number of Community Health Workers for testing and tracing. Last Mile Health and its partners have launched an online classroom and mobile app with free, high-quality digital content to help countries and organizations train community and frontline health workers responding to COVID19. If you're interested in partnering, you can contact Last Mile Health at info@lastmilehealth.org.

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