

The President of the Zimbabwe Tobacco Association

Leaders of farmers' unions

Chief Executive Officer of the Tobacco Industry & Marketing

Board General Manager of Tobacco Research Board

Representatives of the tobacco companies and tobacco seed companies

Representatives from the National Economic Consultative Forum

Distinguished guests

Tobacco farmers here present

ladies and gentleman

Good morning to you all!

1. I feel honoured to be officiating at this grand occasion where we are celebrating the livelihoods of our tobacco farmers in the form of a dedicated day called World Tobacco Growers Day, October 28, a day introduced in 2012 by the International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA), of which Zimbabwe is a Founder member.
2. The World Tobacco Growers day is also about recognizing the social and economic importance of farmers to the country. This past season we had close to 80,000 individual tobacco farmers, employing close to a million people, including family labour either fulltime or seasonal with another one million people supported at downstream level and value addition stage. The revenue generation in 2015/16 season was over US\$600 million. Taking into consideration the value addition and

the downstream industries, including those in the informal markets over US\$1 billion is realized with significant further employment and dependents. Tobacco farmers contribute 12% to National GDP, 50% of agriculture GDP and 30% of foreign currency generation. It is for this great economic contribution, that the Government of Zimbabwe recognised tobacco farmers as primary exporters and awarded them the 5% exporters' incentive, payable to all tobacco farmers shortly.

3. As tobacco farmers, you must embrace this day and celebrate the crop you grow willingly and with great pride. It is because of this crop that you now enjoy a better quality of life and likewise the crop has continued to dominate the sector in terms of earnings.

4. There are once again attempts by the World Health Organisation (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to further regulate the tobacco industry at the Conference of Parties (COP7) to be held in India in early November 2016. We say any attempt to regulate nicotine content the leaf grown and exclusion of tobacco from trade agreements must be sensitive to our plight as developing nations as the tobacco industry is the life blood of our economies. Government will explore all avenues available to ensure safeguard our tobacco industry from the apparent adverse effects of any attempt to regulate the crop. We therefore call upon any discussions under the auspices of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) to recognise and hear the voices of the farmers.

5. Specifically we call upon the WHO FCTC and the world in general to take cognisance of the following among others:
 - i. Tobacco has and continues to immensely contribute to poverty alleviation and economic empowerment;
 - ii. Income from tobacco contributes immensely to many countries employment, GDP, exports and general welfare;
 - iii. The need to mainstream participation by farmers before issuing of regulations;
 - iv. Tobacco lands in most producing countries are a small portion of total arable land;
 - v. Tobacco farmers produce other crops, including food crops too, and
 - vi. Taxes from tobacco products fund portions of nations health budgets (including non-tobacco related health diseases)

6. I can assure our farmers that as the Government of Zimbabwe, we will continue to support the tobacco industry and in particular our farmers.

7. We pray for good rains, to allow our diligent and compliant growers to succeed with good yields and high quality tobacco. I wish you a wonderful day as you celebrate your special day, World Tobacco Growers Day in Zimbabwe.

I thank you.