

**ZTA PRESIDENTS SPEECH – WORLD TOBACCO GROWERS DAY – BELATED CELEBRATIONS –  
BOKA TOBACCO FLOORS – 29 NOVEMBER 2013**

Our Guest of Honour the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Mechanization and Irrigation Development Dr Made, today represented by the Permanent Secretary Eng. Ringson Chitsiko, Honourable Ministers and members of the House of Assembly and Senate and other distinguished guests here present, Dr Stamps Health Advisor- Office of the President, Chairperson of the TIMB Amai Chinamasa, the TIMB Board and its Executive, Presidents of the Farmer Unions and Tobacco Associations and their representatives, the Tobacco Research Board and its Executive, Chief Executive Officer of the Boka Tobacco Forum Ms Rudo Boka and her staff, heads and representatives of the auction floors, merchant companies, tobacco seed houses, input and machinery suppliers, transporters and government parastatals, all invited guests, all tobacco growers, ladies and gentlemen.

We are gathered here today as growers for a belated celebration of the World Tobacco Growers Day (October 28) under the theme ***“Celebrating our farmers and embracing compliance”***. As mentioned earlier, it is a day introduced in 2012 by the International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA) formed in 1984, of which Zimbabwe is a Founder member. As the name applies “tobacco growers’ day”; it is a time for us growers to celebrate the crop we willingly and with great pride produce. It is about respecting the right for us being tillers’ of the land, to grow the crop we choose and that crop is tobacco; the crop that has made a significant impact on our individual livelihoods. Today as growers we enjoy a better quality of life because we grow tobacco. Currently there is no other crop that offers a better return per hectare

farmed than tobacco for thousands of farmers. It is crop that is grown with no barriers; by both genders, all ages, people of different social status and cultures and as a new trend shows, in new areas such as Masvingo and Matabeleland. All of us, are producers of quality, flavour bodied tobacco for export markets. In 2013 there were a total of 79,000 growers that cultivated 90,000 hectares of tobacco producing 167 million kilogrammes of quality tobacco. The forecast for 2014 is a further increase on the number of growers, hectarages and volumes to be produced with 200 million kilogrammes not far off. It is also encouraging to see the resuscitation of our air cured tobacco industry in Zimbabwe and the efforts by the Air Cured Tobacco Association must be commended and the given the support by us all.

We, as Zimbabwean growers currently produce 44 percent of the flue cured tobacco grown on the continent and this is expected to increase to 50 percent. It is important to note that suitable tobacco soils account for only 4% of the total arable land in Zimbabwe. This statistic contradicts the anti tobacco lobbyists who claim that food crop soils are being turned into tobacco lands.

We do however support the growing of selected food crops alongside tobacco and we urge the government, finance houses, food crop seed houses and particularly the tobacco contractors to support and provide for food crop production be it at a subsistence level, to us the growers.

The World Tobacco Growers day is also about recognizing the social and economic importance of us growers to our country Zimbabwe. The country this coming season will have close to if not over 100,000 individual tobacco growers, employing close to a million people, including family labour either fulltime or seasonal; together we support over five million people at a primary level. Our revenue generation in 2013 was over US\$600 million, with a conservative figure of

US\$700 million expected in the coming season. This is at primary level. Taking in consideration now the value addition and the downstream industries, including those in the informal markets over US\$1.5 billion is realized with significant further employment and dependents. We as growers contribute 10% to GDP, and account for 50% of agriculture exports. So how important are we as growers of tobacco? Very! Certainly we are the product of our governments drive for total economic empowerment and transformation.

We as tobacco growers today would not be successful without our valued stakeholders and associated industries participation that create the enabling productive environment.

Honourable Minister, this starts with the Government of Zimbabwe headed by His Excellency President Robert Mugabe, your ministry and AREX, our regulatory body the TIMB, Tobacco Research Board, Kutsaga and ZTSA, chemical, fertilizer, machinery, implements and other key input suppliers, bankers and financiers, transporters, key parastatals such as ZESA, ZINWA, EMA, etc, our auction houses and finally, our partners the tobacco merchants and manufacturers. We would like to take this opportunity to “thank you” each one of you and we look forward to long engaging productive relationship.

What are our threats?

As growers must strive to grow a fully compliant crop that will take the negative attention away from us by those that seek to destroy our livelihoods. By a fully compliant crop, we as growers must:

1. Grow our tobacco only with Tobacco Research Board (TRB) approved chemicals and seed varieties from certified producers.

2. Enforce good agricultural practices and crop management programmes to improve yields and minimize land degradation

3. Protect and manage of our environment and natural resources. As tobacco growers we have come under immense pressure over the issue of deforestation. Yes, we require wood to cure our tobacco but we are not the only users of wood, nor is wood only used for tobacco curing. We applaud and support all reforestation initiatives being taken by the government, parastatals such the Forestry Commission, private sector and more recently the tobacco merchants Sustainable Afforestation Association (SAA). However as growers we implore you all to include us in your programmes. We recognize also the need for sustainable and renewable energy sources to reduce the carbon foot print and climate change and we encourage the TRB and other interested parties to continue looking at this.

4. Reduce Non Tobacco Related Materials (NTRM) in our tobacco as this destroys the integrity of our crop. Good, clean, well presented tobacco will always yield the best returns.

5. Engage in good agricultural labour practices (ALP) and management. This includes training of growers and our workers, provision of health and adequate safety, fair reward to our workers and where it is practiced NO to forced labour (not family labour)

Today, we live in global world where tobacco in some influential quarters is perceived to be an evil product and those that engage in it such as us growers are spared no thought by those whom believe in such statements. The impact of tobacco on the health of individuals whether on us growers, our workers and families, processors, manufacturers, our end user the smoker and the general populace ranks very low when ranked against the World Health Organisation

deadliest causes of death and diseases such as heart disease, strokes, lower respiratory diseases, HIV, and other NCDs. So why we must ask do we have the WHO specifically creating the entity the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) targeting the destruction the tobacco industry; worse still an entity that has NO tobacco representation? In 2010 the FCTC passed articles 9 & 10 which regulate the use of additives and flavouring ingredients in cigarettes. This is going to have a negative impact on the demand for burley tobacco and this will affect our counterpart growers in Brazil, United States and especially Malawi so dependent on tobacco for foreign currency earnings. Even our new spirited local burley industry could be affected. In 2012 the WHO FCTC now took sight of eliminating the tobacco farmer all together after failing to gather support for some its other campaigns worldwide. At the FCTC Conference of Parties (COP) 5 held in South Korea the FCTC tried to force governments who are signatories to the treaty, to start implementing Article 17 which calls on them to start rolling out economic alternatives to tobacco growing and introduce restrictive measures such as: banning minimum support prices and leaf auctions; restricting production by regulating the seasons in which tobacco can be grown, reducing the area allocated for tobacco farming, banning financial or technical support for tobacco growers and dismantling all bodies connecting growers with governments.

Honourable Minister, we were glad to hear that this attempt failed only because of the lobbying of large tobacco consumer and growing nations party to the treaty, the growers petitions that were sent to their governments and by farmer recognition events such as today's, on how important tobacco is to the livelihoods of individuals and nations. The FCTC Working Groups were told to go back and conduct more research and gather scientific data that there

exist sustainable, economic viable alternative crops to tobacco. It still remains our concern however, that the FCTC even on this latest issue does not wish to engage with tobacco growers on whose livelihoods they desire to destroy. The FCTC Working Group on Articles 17 & 18 meet early 2014 in preparation for COP6 in Moscow, Russia in October 2014, where further attempts will be made to regulate and restrict our industry.

Honourable Minister, for us tobacco growers in Zimbabwe, like many of our fellow growers worldwide there are NO sustainable, economic viable alternate crops to tobacco. Zimbabwe has the most suitable conditions for growing the best tobaccos in the world and we must produce it! Demand for our crop continues to grow and here today we must make special mention and show great appreciation of China's (represented by Tian Ze Tobacco Company) valued participation on our market. It therefore means Honourable Minister, that it's is of utmost importance that Zimbabwe urgently completes the ratification process of acceding to the FCTC treaty so that we can defend not only our tobacco growing industry but that of the entire continent under threat. Lets us stop non producing and non tobacco dependent countries; countries and organisations with hidden agendas deciding the future of our industry and livelihoods!

In closing Honourable Minister and all our invited guests, we thank you for sharing this day with us and as tobacco growers we stand united; to protect our industry from any draconian measures by the FCTC; to further increase the production of compliant, quality, flavour tobaccos both flue cured and burley; to increase foreign currency earnings to the country; to be

an employment generator; to be an empowerment vehicle and overall a valued asset to our country and our people.

We now Honourable Minister kindly request of you to accept a Petition signed by representatives of tobacco growers to take to our Government. This Petition asks:

1. Recognition of the socio-economic importance of tobacco growers as individuals, to the development of the Republic of Zimbabwe and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.
2. Recognition of and to defend the right of any farmer to grow the crop of their choice which includes tobacco.
3. Resist attempts by the World Health Organisation - Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) to artificially reduce tobacco growers' production by imposing draconian regulations.
4. Call upon the World Health Organisation - Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) to engage with tobacco growers on all their policies.
5. Officially recognize October 28 of each year as World Tobacco Growers Day.

I thank you.