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African tobacco growers bolstered by Tsvangirai's concern over WHO ingredients ban

Opposition against attempts by the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) to introduce a ban on tobacco ingredients received a boost today with a significant intervention by the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, Morgan Tsvangirai. This follows a recent decision by the COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) trade block to reject this measure.

The Prime Minister delivered a broad-ranging speech at the Economist's Future of Zimbabwe Summit, held in Johannesburg, making specific reference to the success of Zimbabwe's 50,000 small-scale tobacco farmers in producing the largest crop in a decade. Against this backdrop, the Prime Minister commended the WHO for its work over the years, but expressed his and his government's concern with the guidelines that the WHO's FCTC wishes to adopt in November

"I hope that the convention will strike a balance between compelling health considerations and the viability concerns of the global tobacco industry", said Tsvangirai.

Francois van der Merwe, President of the International Tobacco Grower's Association Africa, welcomed the comments saying:

"Imposing an ingredient ban on tobacco products will have damaging and unintended consequences for many African countries as it would severely impact global demand for burley and oriental tobaccos used in blended cigarettes. A ban will cripple their economies and threaten African farmers' livelihoods. It's sadly ironic that the UN General Assembly opens next week in New York - and will discuss progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, including poverty alleviation –

when WHO's proposals to ban tobacco ingredients, will do the reverse and only further impoverish many African countries".

Notes to Editors:

1. WHO FCTC guidelines 9 & 10 recommend a ban of ingredients used in producing blended tobacco products.