

## **Technical Meeting to Promote an Exchange of Views on the Further Development and Implementation of the Integrated Strategy to Address Decent Work Deficits in the Tobacco Sector**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Honorable Fellows,

The International Tobacco Growers' Association, which I represent, thank you for this invitation.

We consider it very timely and necessary for growers to be represented in this debate since they are the largest group involved in this sector, followed by the workers, but growers are not represented and have not been represented so far at the ILO.

This conference is held at a key and, at the same time, controversial moment: In 2003, the ILO stated that there were 100 million people in the tobacco sector. Today we are less but, still, we are talking about more than 40 million growers and workers.

We are concerned about the difficult challenges that this sector is facing with the decline of consumption and the revolution of new tobacco products that will inherently lead to a drop in production, without yet having found a viable alternative to tobacco. This decrease in production affects mainly countries with the highest dependence on tobacco such as Malawi and Zimbabwe. We are witnessing other examples with disastrous consequences such as Colombia, Kyrgyzstan, and Europe, to name a few. In these examples, the fall or total disappearance of tobacco production has generated a significant increase in unemployment, desertification in rural areas, migration to urban centers, increasing poverty, and the inherent increase of child labor.

There is an urgent need for research to identify the best transformation method for this market, its possible consequences, and viable diversification solutions.

In order for a change to be effected and for sustainability to be achieved in this sector, it is necessary to coordinate the work done by United Nations agencies, the WHO, through its Article 17, and the World Bank, in close collaboration with civil society, growers, companies, and foundations and other NGOs.

Our Association and its Members have always expressed their willingness to collaborate and we hope that this conference will make a difference in this direction and that with it, we will see results that lead us to work on concrete initiatives with more actions in the field.

For closure, I would like to emphasize that tobacco growers operate in a legal sector, with real demand, with a market of more than 900 million consumers that will not disappear overnight.

Thanks again for this invitation.

Our best wishes for your conclusions