



November 4th 2019

International Tobacco Growers' Association 34th Annual Meeting gathers tobacco growing countries from 4 continents in Dominican Republic

Santiago de los Caballeros in Dominican Republic was the venue of the 34th International Tobacco Growers' Association (ITGA) annual meeting. The Dominican Republic is the country that will be celebrating 500 years of history of tobacco next year.

On the opening session, Dominican Republic Minister of Agriculture, Osmar Benitez, highlighted the cultural link of tobacco to this country from the time of the indigenous Tainos. The sector, he noted, employs more than one hundred thousand people along the supply chain and generates more than eight hundred million US\$ per year. Moreover, the Industry pays 25 million pesos in salaries, daily, in the Dominican Republic. The tobacco exports generate 900 million dollars in returns being the US the main importer. The Minister also pointed the rapid growth of Dominican Republic in the tobacco sector in the last ten years that has situated this country on the eleventh position on the list of world tobacco exporters. On his final comments, Mr Benitez confirmed the Ministry of Agriculture's commitment to defend and protect tobacco growers and their communities. Manuel Alejandro Ureña, INTABACO, General Director expressed the strong will of the Institute to help growers walk through these difficult times towards a sustainable future. With this aim, the Institute is providing new tools and platforms and working hard not only to sustain the sector but also to promote its growth.

ITGA Delegates from 4 continents, gathered on this occasion to share and analyse the market in their countries. Shane MacGuill, director of tobacco markets research in Euromonitor, analysed the evolution of global consumption of tobacco products and the market for new generation products. He paid special attention to the cannabis market which continues to grow in a wide range of diversified

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products. Tobacco production and prices overview was given by Antonio Abrunhosa, ITGA's CEO, who provided data on the main tobacco growing countries. In his presentation Abrunhosa expressed his concerns for the vicious circle of low prices, overproduction to maintain grower's income and, consequently, even lower prices, a situation becoming common in many markets. On a panel shared by Shane MacGuill and Abrunhosa, they highlighted the worrying signs for tobacco growers, whose markets continue to shrink due mainly to stricter legislation environment and the new generation products entering the market.

Hendrik Kelner, one of the persons with a deeper knowledge of the tobacco history, particularly in the Dominican Republic, shared his ideas about five hundred years of history of tobacco in the country, emphasizing the phases where the market showed more challenges. '500 hundred years later' he noted, 'history repeats itself'. This comment referred to the legislation shadow that follows the industry and, according to Mr Kelner, some centuries ago, almost devastated the market for tobacco in Dominican Republic, when the crop was prohibited under the Spanish colonial control. 'The farmer is always the weakest link on the supply chain and the one to suffer the harshest consequences', Mr Kelner lamented.

The ITGA 34th Annual Meeting concluded on Nov 5th with the Association's General Assembly, where delegates from Member countries shared their views on the challenges and opportunities arising from the current trends and draw a road map for the near future of the only worldwide tobacco growers' association. The Assembly also elected a new Board with Mr Abiel Maseche Kalima Banda, President of the Malawi tobacco growers' association (TAMA Farmers' Trust) becoming the new President of ITGA, Mr José Aranda, from COPROTAB, Salta, Argentina, the new Vice-president and Mr Benício Werner the new Treasurer. Being tobacco growers, they stated their strong commitment to defend the livelihoods of growers and the future of the sector.

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