

## **The International Tobacco Growers' Association 2022 Africa Regional Meeting gathers representatives from multiple tobacco growing countries in Lusaka, Zambia**

**African member organizations of the International Tobacco Growers' Association insist on the need for communication between all tobacco stakeholders, both locally and internationally, to address the growing number of issues impacting the sector. Special attention must be paid to the skyrocketing costs of production and the corresponding prices offered for tobacco, the impact of climate change and the continuing hostility of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control against the sector.**

Immediately following the International Tobacco Growers' Association (ITGA) 2022 Americas Regional Meeting in the Dominican Republic, ITGA member organizations and partners met in Lusaka, Zambia on August 24 and 25 for its 2022 Africa Regional Meeting. The occasion attracted key tobacco sector stakeholders from the region, including delegates from Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, as well as high-ranking government, sector, and industry officials.

Dr. Chizumba Shepande, a representative of the Hon. Mr. M'tolo Phiri, Minister of Agriculture, welcomed all participants to Zambia reminding that the Minister opened the last virtual Annual General Meeting of the ITGA in November 2021. The government expressed its gratitude to growers for their vital contribution to the development of the country. Dr. Shepande also shared official figures from the latest tobacco crop – totalling over 34 million kg, with value exceeding USD 90 million. It was announced that the World Bank granted USD 300 million for developing farm blocks in Zambia, something that can benefit the wider agricultural community. The government remains committed to supporting the sector in line with the national agricultural policy and the national development plan, which emphasizes crop diversification.

The General Manager of the Tobacco Association of Zambia (TAZ), the host organisation, Mr. Albert Van Wyk, highlighted the role of TAZ within the ITGA and reminded the audience about the importance of tobacco exports for the local economy. Mr. Van Wyk also touched upon the significance of local initiatives aiming to create a well-structured and transparent tobacco sector and expressed gratitude to tobacco growers' partners in Zambia, highlighting the interdependence of different stakeholders. Mr. Van Wyk also noted that without the ITGA, the microphone for growers around the world will be switched off.

TAZ President, Mr. Adam Strong, expressed appreciation to the Zambian government for supporting the sector, which is an essential component of the local agriculture, helping with poverty alleviation, sustaining livelihoods, and economic development. Mr. Strong shared that hundreds of thousands of people depend directly on the tobacco sector in the country. This has also resulted in significant investments in infrastructure and implementation of a variety of programs, that include maintaining, building, innovating schools, clinics, as well as providing support for education. Mr. Strong also outlined that it is critical to establish systems to obtain accurate information and data, as well as improve traceability and accountability for the sector in Zambia.

ITGA CEO, Ms. Mercedes Vázquez, summarized the trajectory of tobacco production in the last few decades, namely the move away from countries with high production costs and the change in the tobacco marketing system in favour of direct contracts. In the meantime, regulatory pressure has increased immensely, while multiple anti-tobacco campaigns are getting more and more attention. In

this difficult environment, ITGA and its members have remained resilient, adapted, and strengthened the common platform. Ms. Vázquez reminded that every campaign and initiative the organisation conducts, adds value to the entire supply chain.

The President of ITGA, Mr. Abiel M. Kalima Banda, summarized the myriad of difficulties facing the sector and the global economy at large. Among them, special attention was paid to the rising inflation and skyrocketing production costs. Mr. Banda expressed his worries regarding climate change and the urgent need to protect the environment. Mr. Banda also insisted on the inclusion of tobacco growers in global discussions, where the future of the sector is being decided. Finally, Mr. Banda paid attention to the necessity of guaranteeing a decent working environment to farmers and called for protection by local governments.

Ivan Genov, ITGA Manager Tobacco Industry Analysis, presented a global market overview, focusing on leaf production, regulations, consumer dynamics, industry transformation and emerging opportunities, including cannabis. Mr. Genov paid special attention to the war in Ukraine and its potential effect on agriculture in Africa and warned against costs of production which are going out of hand in many of the key tobacco producing markets.

Michiel Reerink, Alliance One's International Corporate Affairs Director and Managing Director, briefed the audience about the latest regulatory developments ranging from the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Conferences of the Parties (COP) 9 and 10 to the EU Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) 2 and legislation proposals in the US, such as the menthol ban and the nicotine reduction plan. Mr. Reerink also highlighted the importance of supply chain due diligence and the expected consequences for the sector, including key proposals and obligations.

Mercedes Vázquez, ITGA CEO, focused on WHO FCTC Article 5.3 (industry interference) and Article 17, covering the need to promote economically viable alternatives to tobacco production. Ms. Vázquez expressed frustration regarding Article 17's current failure on country-level. This has resulted in the inability to find economically viable alternatives to tobacco production and to prevent the adverse social and economic impacts on growers and populations whose livelihoods depend on the crop. Ms. Vázquez also expressed her goal to make everything possible to include tobacco growers in forums where their future is being decided – primarily the FCTC COP, where the ITGA is being denied its legitimate representation.

Mr. Shadreck Mwale, Chief Agricultural Officer – Crops Production, from the Zambian Ministry of Agriculture delivered a presentation on the climate change effects on agriculture in Zambia. Over the course of the last three decades, the impact of floods and droughts have been estimated to cost the country around USD 13.8 billion. Several small-scale projects have made inroads into supporting farmers, but this has unfortunately not been done to scale to impact the entire agricultural value chain. The key climate issues in Zambia include droughts, floods, extreme temperatures, shortening and delayed onset of the rainy season. This leads to declining productivity and adverse impacts on food security.

Innocent Mugwagwa, ECLT Foundation, and Sheilla Bauren, Tobacco Industry and Marketing Board, presented a case study for Zimbabwe on mobilizing industry action against child labour. The example was centred around a report by the Human Rights Watch and the following actions taken to address the issue. ECLT's Protect, Respect, Remedy framework is essential in this approach, where emphasis is also given to finding solutions at government and local regulatory level. Ms. Bauren presented the progress made regarding the Human Rights Watch recommendations, lessons learnt and future plans to continue the positive work delivered so far.

The open session on August 24 concluded with participants agreeing with a Declaration, summarizing some of the key challenges facing the sector, such as the sharply growing costs of production and the wider agricultural issues arising from the war in Ukraine. Growers are also very concerned about the impact of climate change that is affecting farming communities around the world. Growers expressed willingness to contribute to fighting climate change issues though the vast experience they have built over many generations. The Declaration also reflected growers' disappointment about the increasing hostility of the WHO FCTC with the tobacco sector. Tobacco growers will, from now on, put high levels of pressure to ensure their participation and will do their utmost to ensure their legitimate representation at the future COP. The next one will take place in Panama in 2022. Tobacco growers appeal to their governments and all partners in the supply chain, considering that tobacco production is an important generator of employment and provides great economic benefits in the countries where it is grown, to come together and face the common challenges in a united way.