

Welcome Remarks by Mr Denias Zaranyika, President of the Africa Seed Trade Association at the 2017 AFSTA Congress, Dakar, Senegal, 28 February 2017

The Board, management and staff of AFSTA

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and gentlemen

It is my great pleasure and privilege to welcome you all and thank you for coming out in such huge numbers for our annual gathering.

I also wish to extend a special welcome to Jean-Christophe Gouache, the president of the International Seed Federation, whose presence, wealth of experience and knowledge in the seed industry is not only invaluable but will certainly add colour to our deliberations.

Allow me also to welcome all esteemed Past presidents of AFSTA; representatives of cooperating partners; distinguished invitees representing COMESA, African Union, SADC and ECOWAS; and other special invitees including members of the media.

As you know our last congress in Nairobi, Kenya; was extremely busy and highly successful. So fruitful were our deliberations and decisions adopted that they paved the way for the work of your Board over the past 12 months.

We will indeed reflect and discuss many of these issues during the course of the next few days of a busy agenda. There are many important issues to deal with, some of which are quite detailed and specific like navigating the topical issue of climate change that continues to dominate our discussions because of the extreme effect it has on food security. We will also look at the work we are doing through the Special Interest Groups on vegetables and field crops.

As we reflect on the Special Interest Groups; we pay special tribute to Guy Blaise Satsa, who chaired our SIG-vegetables, but sadly passed on a few weeks ago. Guy had the honour of being the second president of AFSTA, and therefore rightly laid a strong foundation for the growth of our association. A widely regarded and true seedsman, he was devoted to serving the best

interests of farmers, growers, industry and consumers. May his soul rest in peace.

While the challenges facing our industry are many, they are certainly not insurmountable. What we do is always determined by what we see. AFSTA believes in the vast opportunities in Africa. We see a future for seed trade and through it answers to the problems of hunger, nutrition, markets and production. We see opportunity for partnership and collaboration with other input suppliers, farmer organisations, agricultural policy makers and output market players.

AFSTA sees an opportunity to make a difference because we are committed to Africa's agriculture-led development agenda. Where others see increasing hunger in Africa, we see an opportunity to contribute to increasing food production and feeding Africa's growing population through improved access to better seed.

Where others see infrastructural problems, we see an opportunity to work with other players, positively influencing policy and priorities and improving our distribution models. Where others see the challenges of Climate Change, we see an opportunity to make our research, breeding, production, extension support and market fit for purpose and relevant to the felt-needs of African farmers.

Where others see problems with farming inputs, we see a total value chain and opportunities to collaborate with other players to make African agriculture better. Where others see shortages of highly developed research skills and facilities, we see an opportunity for investment and development. Where others see governments as stumbling blocks, we see our governments in Africa as partners who we can proactively engage in agriculture policy and trade dialogue.

Therefore, AFTSA's commitment is long term because we believe in Africa. Perhaps this commitment starts by appreciating the efforts of the African Union in advocating for agricultural development as endorsed in Maputo in 2003 by African Heads of State through the adoption of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) that emphasised on agriculture and agriculture-led development to improve food security and

nutrition; wealth and job creation, empowering women and enabling the expansion of exports.

It is also instructive that in 2014, the African Heads of State further recommitted to the principles of CAADP through the Malabo Declaration whose specific goals were to enhance investment finance in agriculture; ending hunger in Africa by 2025; halving poverty by 2025; boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services; and enhancing resilience of livelihoods and production systems to climate variability and other related risks.

No doubt the seed industry takes centre stage in these efforts. AFSTA's priorities are therefore not just a viable seed trade but sustainable and viable agriculture production and value chains. AFSTA can do no less than embrace and support the CAADP principles. But more importantly, the African Union's aspiration is for Africa to be a strategic player in agricultural science and technology development. This is a direct call and challenge for AFSTA to play a meaningful part. Seed is not grain. Seed is a technology and AFSTA is committed to encouraging its members to continue to invest in seed science, technology and skills.

As your President, I have been in close, regular contact with the Secretariat since the last Congress. I have been discussing many issues with the Secretariat to ensure that we are focused on our mission to promote trade in quality seeds and technologies in Africa. I have also been keen to ensure that we fulfil on our main objectives as espoused in our founding principles to strengthen communication with the seed industry in Africa and the world; providing information to members; and enhancing our interactions with regional governments and NGOs and other stakeholders involved in seed activities in order to promote the interests of the private seed industry.

I have no doubt that some of our deliberations over the next few days will throw some light on how well we are doing in meeting these objectives; and that this congress will give advice and support on the way forward.

Colleagues, as I address you today, I am deeply convinced that AFSTA remains relevant and significant player to make real, tangible difference to the issue of food security in Africa. We are a unique organisation that gets traction at the

national, regional and continental levels through our various interactions with national seed associations and other stakeholders.

The high level of interest and attendance at our Congresses and meetings by AFSTA members, intergovernmental organisations, international and national non-governmental organizations and the private sector clearly shows the level of interest and importance of AFSTA.

While our decisions are critical, it is not really in this room that the battle to combat food security and efforts to ensure sustainable use of quality seeds is won or lost. The main effort rests at our national seed associations which are the front lines in this collective battle to uproot the scourge of hunger on our continent.

In as much as we are doing well at national and AFSTA levels to ensure the provision of quality seeds to our farmers, we must not lose sight of the fact that we achieve more through partnerships. I have mentioned it before; and let me reiterate that without partnerships we cannot hope to adequately fulfil our agenda. I am therefore proud that we remain committed to maintaining good relationships with other stakeholders that include multilateral organisations, donors, non-governmental organisations and our national governments, most of whom are represented at this gathering.

Partnerships are part and parcel of African wisdom. A Swahili proverb says: "Unity is strength, division is weakness". As we unite and execute AFSTA's strategy we can only get better and move forward as an industry.

Yet another African proverb says: "Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodile won't eat you." There are many rivers and challenges to cross in the seed trade. One company acting alone will be eaten by crocodiles. However, working as an AFSTA team will ensure that we all survive and thrive.

The concept of partnerships is further highlighted by other African proverbs which say:

- "Two ants do not fail to pull one grasshopper."
- "A single bracelet does not jingle."
- "A single stick may smoke, but it will not burn."

Dear colleagues, allow me to acknowledge the work being done by our Secretariat under the guidance of Justin to ensure that AFSTA fulfils its objectives to its members. That we are gathered here and in such huge numbers takes a lot of organisational effort.

Let me also take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all the Board members and many of you who voluntarily participate in the many working groups of AFSTA. When we consider the members of our various committees, all of those who volunteer their support to our work, together with the support of our Secretariat, we are a great team!

Dear colleagues, this is our once in a year chance to engage each other on issues to do with our industry. This is your congress. Let us therefore engage in open and frank dialogue about our industry and how we can contribute towards making our continent seed and food secure. We look forward to some interesting debates!

Let me conclude these welcome remarks by once again thanking you for your strong support for AFSTA. Your support and presence here is indicative of the steps we have made in the right direction in growing our organisation; and of the many possibilities of what could be in the future if we continue on this path.

The future of AFSTA is extraordinarily bright; and stronger than ever before. We are ready to push the limits; but also recognise that the future success of AFSTA lies with the continued commitment and contributions of young people. We must therefore commit to investing in and promoting their development; and encourage their participation in all our activities.

On behalf of the Board, I once again welcome you all to the 2017 AFSTA Congress here in Dakar; and show appreciation to the local organising committee for the wonderful work that they have done in preparing for our very important gathering. Please join me also in recognizing and thanking our sponsors for their continued support for this congress. My special thanks go to our main sponsor Syngenta and all the 2017 gold sponsors (Dupont Pioneer, Pannar and Limagrain); and bronze sponsors (Rijk Zwaan, Seed Co, Tropicasem and Bayer). We should also extend thanks to all the companies that have taken up the exhibition booths.

Wishing you the best in the deliberations and also urge you to spare a moment to enjoy this beautiful country.

I THANK YOU