



Harare, 02 October 2015

Launching ceremony

Support to the Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement

Intervention by

**Philippe Van Damme, Ambassador,
Head of EU Delegation to Zimbabwe**

Venue: Harare, Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement



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Honourable Minister of Lands and Rural Resettlement,

Honourable Deputy Minister of Lands and Rural Resettlement,

Permanent Secretary for Lands and Rural Resettlement,

Dear Colleagues, Ambassadors and Heads of Missions of the EU Member States in Zimbabwe,

Senior Officials in the President's Office, in Cabinet, and in the office of the National Authorising Officer of the EDF,

Senior Officials in the Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement and related Ministries,

Members of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

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Let me start by thanking the Honourable Minister of Lands and Rural Resettlement for having organised this gathering. We all know that the land question is central in Zimbabwe's political, economic and social arena and therefore needs special attention from all of us. We also all know, for the same reasons, how sensitive this theme is and it is therefore good and courageous to have brought the various stakeholders together today and to have the opportunity to deliberate in an objective and constructive manner on various aspects pertaining to the land issue in Zimbabwe.

Honourable Minister,

Land is a key resource for the development and prosperity of Zimbabwe and its citizens. The sector provides livelihood for about 70% of the population, accounts for 23% of formal employment and supplies about 60% of raw materials to the industry. Considering the huge potential of an extensive fertile soil, common efforts are still necessary to unlock this potential. In fact, nowadays and because of compounding factors such as climate change, inadequate farming practices, poor infrastructure or limited access to inputs and credits, the productivity of the agricultural sector of Zimbabwe is among the lowest in the region.

We believe the EU can contribute addressing the challenges. In line with the objectives of the Cotonou Agreement, the strategic objective of the EU's development cooperation with Zimbabwe is to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty and to support peace and stability, by supporting inclusive and sustainable growth and promoting human rights, democracy and rule of law. Among its focus sectors of intervention, the EU will support economic development based on sustainable agriculture in order to assure food security, increase resilience of the most vulnerable populations (most of whom are women and children), and contribute to employment creation and income generation. The rationale of focusing EU support to the agricultural sector is the recognition of its key role as a major engine of economic and social development in Zimbabwe. The EU support to the agriculture-based economic development sector is also aligned with the priorities and goals of ZIM ASSET, the National Trade and the Industrial Development Policies and the Zimbabwe Agriculture Investment Plan (ZAIP), among others.

To unlock the potential of land, close attention needs to be paid to the implementation of the land reform as a key factor to ensure a prosperous agriculture sector. For many years the implementation of this reform has generated frustrations and conflict situations. While learning from the past, together we should look into the future and explore ways to address some of the still outstanding issues.

The EU, in close cooperation with UNDP is currently supporting a specific program, which assist the MLRR to improve the regulatory framework and management of the land as a prerequisite for development of agriculture and other land based economic sectors. This project will be catalytic in addressing the critical areas towards the finalization of some of the main outstanding issues such as base mapping and surveying of the resettled areas, valuation and compensation of land, conflict resolution, review of the land tenure policy, as well as supporting the functioning of the forthcoming Land Commission. Still in its initial stages of implementation, and despite a slow start, I do acknowledge that this program has now reached its momentum and the level of cooperation and commitment from a number of stakeholders has been taken a step forward.

At the same time, we do also acknowledge a number of challenges that still need to be addressed:

a. On the setup of a new Land Commission: a new land Commission Bill is being drafted and is, I understand, currently subject to various reviews, before being transmitted to the Parliament for further endorsement. The role of this Commission will be essential in the future to address key issues such as ensuring accountability, fairness and transparency in the administration of agriculture land, carrying out periodic audits or addressing any complaint or dispute regarding administration and allocation of agriculture land.

We do appreciate the level of commitment from your Ministry, Honourable Minister, to carry out this process in a professional and committed manner. At the same time, in view of the high importance that this legal Act has, we strongly encourage the Government to ensure that the drafting process is carried out in a participatory and inclusive manner as required by the Constitution and the repeatedly expressed common will by all stakeholders to come to an inclusive understanding of its mandate and operations. There should be no rush in such process, as quality should prevail against time. In addition to the above, we also strongly advocate in line with section 297(6)(a) of the Constitution for the highest possible independence of this Commission, to ensure its role and functions are executed to its best capacity.

b. On Valuation and compensation of acquired land, the Constitution is also very clear, stipulating in its section 72(3)(a) that all improvements effected have to be compensated, as also detailed as per the Land Acquisition Act and acknowledged in the "Strategies for Clearing External Debt Arrears and the Supportive Economic Reform Agenda" that the government will present to the international community in Lima on 8 October. In this regard, it is important to achieve a consensus based compensation mechanism that is workable and acceptable to all concerned, in line with the existing guidelines and procedures. Again, the EU does strongly emphasize the importance of carrying out this exercise in an inclusive manner, where all parties concerned (including the various Farmers Unions) are not only consulted but can contribute to reach a consensus about the key criteria and mechanism established;

c. New and old farmers suffer from low access to financial services, key to ensure adequate investment in the sector as well as to allow and ensure timely access to inputs which can increase the likelihood of a successful agriculture season.

Security of tenure is a necessity and we therefore look forward to a finalization of the process which will render the 99-year lease agreements (and other title deeds) more bankable (and therefore transferable) for credit purposes....

The farming environment has fundamentally changed since Independence. The unequal access to land had to be corrected and land reform therefore was unavoidable and desirable. How the land reform was implemented has been disputed at length. I'm not mandated to rewrite the past, but we have a common interest in a prosperous and sustainable future for this country. This passes by a clarification of the land issue. Whatever the structure of land ownership, and worldwide we have a whole range of possible systems, one thing stands out for all farmers, smallholder or commercial farmer, and this is the need for clarity and predictability on land tenure to increase investment opportunities for more productive farming systems and achieving improved yields..

As EU we are persuaded of the importance of creating that more conducive investment climate in agriculture to help all farmers of Zimbabwe to improve their farming capacity for a more productive agriculture land and a better future; a future where farming as a business become an increased driver for development, with a population more resilient to shocks and food crises.

This is a key priority in our dialogue and cooperation with the Government of Zimbabwe and all other stakeholders. I therefore truly welcome the platform offered today, Honourable Minister, for a honest and genuine debate and look forward to a successful collaboration. I thank you.