

The President and Council of the Commercial Farmers Union, The Deputy Minister of Lands and Rural Resettlement, the leaders and members of other Farmer organizations here present, Government Officials here present, Distinguished members of the Diplomatic core, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to be invited to officiate at this occasion today and I am particularly interested in the theme of this year's Annual Congress of the Commercial Farmers' Union, namely: "Building the Competitiveness of Zimbabwe's Agricultural Sector".

Ladies and Gentlemen, agriculture is the life blood of Zimbabwe's economy and society. If our agricultural industry does not perform to a globally competitive standard, it follows that our economy will likewise fail to perform. Thus the importance of creating an environment that fosters a vibrant and competitive agricultural industry cannot be overemphasized.

For every job that we can create in agriculture we will create 7 more thorough the value chain if we can ensure the competitiveness of our agricultural industry. This is therefore crucial to the realization of the aspirations of ZIM ASSET Economic Blueprint and the 10 Point Plan presented by His Excellency the President.

To this end I am pleased to note that Government has acknowledged the importance of economic competitiveness by seeking in the term of the next parliament of Zimbabwe to establish a National Competitiveness Commission. It is envisaged that the mandate of this commission will be to tackle the issue of competitiveness.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to convey Government's commitment and particularly the Commitment of the Ministry of Agriculture, Agricultural Mechanisation and Irrigation Development to facilitating the creation of a business environment that fosters improved competitiveness of the Agricultural Industry and agricultural value chains. I am aware that many of the stakeholders present here today will have identified a number of impediments to the competitiveness of the value chains in which you operate. As Government I remind you that our doors are always open to you and we are prepared to engage on these issues.

A competitive and easy business environment is what we all aspire to create and Government and players in the private sector should be partners in the process of delivering this aspiration.

By now I would expect stakeholders to be aware that the Ministry of Agriculture, Agricultural Mechanisation and Irrigation Development has facilitated the creation of The Zimbabwe Agricultural Investment Plan (ZAIP). The overall goal of ZAIIP is to facilitate sustainable increase in production, productivity and competitiveness of Zimbabwean agriculture through building capacity of farmers and institutions, and improving the quantity and quality of public, private and development partner investment and policy alignment'. The implementation of the ZAIIP is therefore squarely in line with the creation of a highly competitive agricultural Industry.

I am cognizant of the fact that Zimbabwe is ranked extremely poorly by the World Bank in terms of the Ease of Doing business. In fact our ranking for 2015 was 153 out of 155 ranked countries. I am pleased

to report that Government under the office of the President and Cabinet is addressing the issues surrounding the ease of doing business.

In agriculture, I am aware that the issues surrounding costs of compliance, particularly in the livestock sector, have been posing enormous challenges to viability and competitiveness. I would like to once again encourage stakeholders to continue their engagements with us over these issues. It is our role to facilitate and strike an appropriate and fair balance between the competing interests of state institutions and the desperate need to ensure viability and competitiveness.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at this point and with these few remarks it gives me great pleasure to officially open the 73rd Annual Congress of the Commercial Farmers' Union and I look forward to listening to the fruitful deliberations around this year's theme.

I thank you.