

President's Speech CFU Congress 2020

The Minister of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate and Rural Resettlement, Honourable Dr. Anxious Masuka – represented today by the Deputy Minister, Honourable Douglas Karoro, Dr. Theo de Jager, President of the World Farmers' Organisation, joining us via zoom, Maj. Gen. Chanakira (Rtd) Chairman of the Technical Committee of the JRMC, members of the Diplomatic Community also joining us via zoom, invited guests, past presidents, trustees, councillors, farmers and friends both here present and those joining us on the zoom platform. It is an honour and a privilege for me to welcome you all to the 77th Annual Congress of the Commercial Farmers' Union of Zimbabwe, and I would like to thank each one of you for making time in your busy schedules to be a part of our proceedings today. As the year 2020 has been unlike anything any of us has ever experienced before, so to this Congress is a Congress like none we have ever had before. The Covid 19 Pandemic which has ravaged the world since February 2020 has forever changed the way most of do life and highlighted the fact that we can live quite well without much of what we thought we had to have in order to survive.

The theme of this year's congress is The Past, The Present and The Future. I would like to start by reflecting a little on the past. As an organization we are in our 78th Year of existence and have been an integral part of Commercial Agriculture since those early days. As the Commercial Agricultural sector grew so too did the importance and the role of the CFU and so too did the Zimbabwean Agriculture Sector as a whole until in the 90's we became known as the Bread Basket of Southern Africa as we experienced our heyday.

Unfortunately for us and for the nation as a whole, the unresolved conflict over land boiled over and in 2001 gave birth to the Fast Track Land Reform Programme which not only saw a number of our members losing their lives, but also resulted in the vast majority losing all that they had invested their whole lives into. Some, like myself were permitted to remain on our farms which have over the last almost 20 years been subjected to numerous down-sizing exercises and in many cases we now operate on pieces of land which are sub economic in size. We have however done our best to continue our operations in the most difficult and trying of circumstances, living with the continual fear that at any time and without warning someone could arrive and tell us that they are now the owners of the farm. Whilst the few of us on the land have struggled on, most of our counterparts who had no option but to move into town or leave the country have also over the same period struggled to survive as the ravages of inflation caused whatever savings they may have had to become worthless and advanced age or poor health made them unemployable whilst they waited for the Compensation that the Government of Zimbabwe is Constitutionally obligated to pay. Sadly, for many the wait has been just too long and they are no longer with us.

It was in the midst of the situation which I have just described that some far sighted individuals realised that the day would eventually come when things would change in Zimbabwe and so they led by John Laurie set about working together to put in place the things that would be needed to ensure that a credible compensation process would be able to be undertaken when the opportunity presented itself.

I would now like to turn to the present. The momentous events that took place at the end of 2017 which saw His Excellency E.D. Mnangagwa become the President of Zimbabwe presented the opportunity that John Laurie and his team had been preparing for, and encouraged by His Excellency's President Mnangagwa's commitment to settle the long outstanding issue of Compensation and his policy of re-engagement with the West, the Compensation Steering Committee redoubled their efforts to work with the Government and find a way forward. It was largely due to the efforts of this team that the signing of the Global Compensation Deed on 29 July 2020 became a reality. Whilst the signing of the agreement itself was a milestone, the process that led to its signing and the ongoing process that is vital to ensure that it ultimately successfully delivers the compensation as laid out, is of far greater importance. Since the start of the FTLRP, Zimbabwe has been characterised by division and polarisation with the Government and the farmers, viewing each other with at best great suspicion and at worst as mortal enemies.

The current ongoing process has radically changed this and is taking place in an atmosphere of inclusivity and mutual respect, with a genuine desire on all sides to work together for the benefit of Zimbabwe. It is the inclusive nature of the process, the recognition that all of us are Zimbabweans no matter what our background, class or skin colour, that we all have a role to play and that we all need each other which give me hope for the future. There is a verse in the Bible which says that a house divided cannot stand, and there is another which says where there is unity The Lord Commands His blessing. If ever we needed the blessing of the Lord on Zimbabwe it is now.

Continuing on with the present, those who attended last year's Congress may remember that the former Minister of Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement, the late Air Chief Marshall (Rtd) Perence Shiri in his address to us committed to the issuing of tenure documents to all former farm owners who were still farming on their original farms or portions thereof. Following last year's Congress, meetings were held to try and speed up this process, but very little progress was made, until the signing of the Global Compensation Deed and the subsequent issuing of a joint statement by the minister of Finance and Economic Development, Dr. Mthuli Ncube and the Minister of Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement, Dr. Anxious Masuka on 31 August. Since then, there has been a dramatic increase in activity in this regard. Yesterday, 83 Applications for Offer Letters from former farm owners who are still farming on their original farms or portions thereof without any tenure documents were submitted to the Minister of Lands and in a meeting also held yesterday there was a commitment to ensure that the Offer Letters will be issued expeditiously. My hope is that this would be the first of numerous measures that will be put in place to restore confidence that the commercial agricultural sector is a safe place to invest.

Similarly, there is a strong commitment on behalf of the Government of Zimbabwe to speedily deal with the re-instatement of Title Deeds for those BIPPA protected farmers who qualify. This is something that will go a long way towards reassuring foreign investors that Zimbabwe respects property rights and is a safe place to invest. A further current positive development is the timely payment of the second Interim Relief Payment which under the terms of Global Compensation Agreement is payable to those who wish to receive it. This is a dramatic improvement on the IR1 process.

Turning now to the future: I personally and the Commercial Farmers Union as an organisation are committed to seeing the Compensation Process through to finality, not only because we owe it to those whose resources built the organisation but now are no longer able to farm, but also because it is only the payment of compensation that will bring an end to the conflict surrounding the land and enable the full recovery of the commercial agricultural sector. Having said this, however, our core business has always been providing services to active farmers, something we have managed to continue over the last 20 years alongside our work on behalf of those waiting for compensation.

Whilst the Compensation Process that we have embarked on is still in its early stages, progress is being made and it is starting to gather momentum. It is my earnest prayer and hope that it will be successful beyond expectation and that it will in the not too distant future bring closure to what has been an extremely painful and difficult period of our history and at the same time lay the foundations on which a thriving and highly productive agricultural sector can be rebuilt. As compensation becomes a reality, we as an organisation will be able to return to focusing exclusively on our core business. In order to position ourselves correctly and ensure that we are prepared for the future, we have with the assistance of an independent consultant begun the process of developing a strategic plan. Historically, despite having a diverse membership, the CFU has been viewed as a “white” organisation and our goal is to ensure that we are able to make the transition into an organisation with a broad based multi-racial membership and which is able to provide the services all its members require, thus becoming the Union of choice for commercial farmers.

As I said earlier, the last 20 years have been difficult, challenging and tiring for all of us and their comes a time in all of our lives when we need make some changes and let go of some things and move on to others. Today is for our director Ben Purcell-Gilpin what will most likely be his last Annual Congress as a member of staff. After 10 years of exemplary and sacrificial service he has decided that his time at the CFU is coming to an end. Ben has in my estimation been the finest director that the CFU has ever had. I will greatly miss his great wisdom and insights and his ability to handle an unbelievable work load without ever complaining. Finding someone to fill Ben’s shoes will be a tall order. We will all greatly miss him.

As I begin to draw to a close, I would like to say that after serving two years as the President of the CFU, I am becoming more convinced than ever that our creator, Almighty God is working today in the affairs of men and that he uses people to accomplish His plans and purposes and that we all have a part to play. In The Lord’s Prayer, which I pray almost on a daily basis, there is a line which says “Your Kingdom Come, Your will be done here on earth as it is in Heaven”. I along with many other Zimbabweans pray this every day and I am looking forward to the day when our prayers are answered and the way we do things in Zimbabwe looks like Heaven. If I didn’t believe that there is hope for us and that God has not forsaken us, I certainly would not have the motivation to keep going.

Finally, I would like to thank our many friends who encourage and support us. Without your support we would not still be going. I would like to thank our small but dedicated CFU Staff

team who have and continue to work so diligently through the extremely difficult times we are going through. Thank you also to the CFU Council for your support over the last year and I look forward to a year of growth. Thank you also to the Compensation Steering Committee and in particular the retired Chairman John Laurie, the current Chairman Charles Taffs and all the members for their tireless and mostly thankless efforts on behalf of all of us who are waiting for our compensation.

To my wonderful wife Louise and my family, thank you for supporting and encouraging me to keep going along this journey, and last but not least, Thank you to my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for your overwhelming goodness to me. I am truly blessed to be living in Zimbabwe at this time in our history and I am looking forward to seeing you work miracles that will astound us all.

My prayer is that the 2020-21 farming season will bring the abundant rains and the bountiful harvests that we all so badly need.

May God bless you all.

Andrew Pascoe
CFU President