

President's Speech CFU Congress 2021

The Minister of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Resettlement, Honourable Dr. Anxious Masuka, today represented by, President of the World Farmers' Organisation Dr. Theo De Jager, members of the Diplomatic Community, past presidents, trustees, councillors, invited guests, farmers and friends both here present or joining us via the zoom platform. It is an honour and a privilege for me to welcome you all to the 78th 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 we draw towards the end of 2021 there are signs that at last a post Covid world is emerging as nations around the world are opening up and the challenge is now to make up for the lost production and overcome the many other affects of the extended lockdowns that have been enforced around the world. Although the seriousness of the pandemic has of late diminished, as a precaution, we chose to hold our Congress virtually again this year. Hopefully, by next year's Congress things will be back to normal.

For us as a community the last year has been extremely difficult with much sadness and pain as many of us have either been affected by illness ourselves or by the illness or loss of family members and friends. Our hearts go out today to all those who have suffered and our thoughts and prayers are with those who have lost family members.

Moving on, I would like to express my appreciation to our Minister Dr. Masuka. Since he has come into office his door has, despite his extremely busy schedule, always been wide open to us even if it is at 6:30am on a cold winter morning! This is certainly an indication of the very long days he puts in for his constituents in our industry. After so many years of being shunned under the previous dispensation, I am extremely grateful to you for the open door policy that you have towards the CFU and I count it a great privilege to be able to interact with you as often as I do. I also greatly appreciate the frank and honest discussions which we are able to have as we deal with challenging issues.

I would also like to thank you Honourable Minister for facilitating the introduction of the confidence building measures following the signing of the Global Compensation Deed on 29 July 2020, namely the issuing of Offer letters and 99 Year leases to former farm owners who are still farming all or a portion of their original farms. To date 126 of our farmers have received Offer Letters through this initiative and many 99 Year Leases are currently being processed. I would however like to highlight the fact that there are still over 100 applications for Offer Letters which are outstanding. We are aware that of these, about 40

have not been approved on the basis that there is No land. Our own investigations have shown that the majority of these applicants are still in occupation on all or a portion of their original farms, farming productively and with no resettlement on their land. We are looking forward to working with you to bring a resolution to these cases.

I would now like to move on to the Global Compensation Deed which was signed on 29 July 2020. Much time and energy has been expended this past year trying to mobilise resources to enable the Government to fulfil its obligations under the Deed. Unfortunately, for numerous reasons, the process has moved a lot slower than anticipated and at the request of the Government, the date for the initial payment was postponed by 12 months to 29 July 2022.

We have been very active with our colleagues in Government in the Joint Resource Mobilisation Committee and in addition to this, we through the Compensation Steering Committee have and continue to pursue other options. Whilst there is currently little in the way of tangible results, there are a number of very promising prospects which we are pursuing. There is much work to be done, but we continue to be hopeful that things will fall into place in time for the new timelines to be met.

One area which continues to cause us a great deal of concern and consternation is that of the Interim Relief Payments which under the terms of the GCD the Government has agreed to pay. Over the past 3 years Government has in the national budget made funds available for interim relief payments. Unfortunately, the administrative and bureaucratic processes surrounding the interim relief payments are so lengthy and cumbersome that the funds that were allocated in the 2020 budget for IR2 still have not been fully paid out and none of the funds set aside in the 2021 budget have been paid out. The postponement of the initial payment date in the GCD by 12 months means that those that are due compensation are going to have to wait 12 months longer than expected for their payments. Many are advanced in age and in dire financial need. It is therefore absolutely imperative that a streamlined and more efficient payment process is instituted as soon as possible so that the money that has been set aside for the farmers can get to them.

The theme of this year's Congress is "Paving the way for a sustainable revival in agricultural production. It is indisputable that the foundation for a highly productive agricultural sector is access to land with a secure form of tenure. Indeed, it was the tenure system that was in place prior to Land Reform that enabled Zimbabwe to become the bread basket of Southern Africa. Whilst we are fully aware that Land Reform cannot and should not be reversed, in order for

there to be a sustainable revival in our agricultural production it is essential that the conflict over the land be dealt with and property rights be recognised by the payment of compensation and that there be access to land with a bankable, tradable and secure form of tenure for those who wish to farm.

If we stop and consider the facts, we will realise that the signing of the Global Compensation Deed in July 2020 was a momentous achievement. For 20 years there has been nothing but conflict and polarisation and at last we have an agreement in place that enables us to work together and focus our efforts on finding solutions to the challenges that are facing us and thus pave the way for a sustainable revival in agricultural production. I would like to thank His Excellency President Mnangagwa for ensuring that the GCD became a reality.

In 2018 I attended a function at which His Excellency President Mnangagwa gave an address and he quoted some words found in the Bible in Is. 43:18 & 19 (read them). He himself said that he believed that God was going to do a new thing in Zimbabwe. I am convinced that these words are true and that the GCD is part of the new thing and that our efforts will not be in vain.

Whilst we are continuing to put energy and time into the Compensation Process and all that it encompasses, it is obvious that the long term future of the CFU depends on our ability to attract new members who are actively farming. To this end, we are also doing our best with the limited resources at our disposal to support and provide services to those of our members who are actively farming.

In order to encourage higher production, there have been weekly Zoom meetings chaired by the Minister, during which issues of concern are raised and solutions proposed. These have been very helpful and summaries of the outcomes of these meetings are published in our weekly bulletin, CFU Calling and on the CFU WhatsApp groups.

We are also almost continuously involved in wage negotiations with the quarterly NEC wage negotiations for the 7 different sectors in Agriculture. These are extremely challenging but it is vital that we participate to ensure that wages do not increase to levels that will threaten viability. We are also continuing to lobby for a reduction in the number of sectors and for a reduction in the number of wage reviews that are held each year.

The Covid-19 lockdown regulations unfortunately severely restricted open meetings and travel during the year due. It is our hope that this coming year we will be able to get out into the farming areas and participate in and encourage the development of local farmer discussion groups and from these rebuild the structures that will enable organised agriculture to grow from grass roots again.

We are also in the process of developing a new App which we are hoping will be a powerful tool which will attract the younger generation of farmers.

At the office we have managed to remain open for most of the year because under the Covid lockdown we were considered as an Essential Service. We did have one scare though with one infected person visiting us but all tests done on staff came back negative. Most of the staff have now had their double vaccination.

We have teamed up with Sustainable Agriculture Trust (SAT) who are financing a programme to help us move forward again and recruit additional membership. We now have new computers to replace those the staff have been using for so many years and are now outdated and more recently they have also helped us solve another long-standing problem by financing the digitalisation of our archives as we have no storage space where we are now. The useful information will be uploaded onto our website where it will be accessible to paid up members for free and to anyone else for a fee.

In closing, 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. I would especially like to thank Mike Clark who has done an outstanding job as acting Director and Louise O'Connor the CFU Office Manager for keeping the wheels of the CFU turning so well despite the many challenges. Thank you also to the CFU Council for your support over the last year and I look forward to a year of growth this coming year. Thank you also to the Compensation Steering Committee and in particular Charlie Taffs and Harry Orphanides for their tireless efforts on behalf of all of us who are waiting for our compensation. I would also like to thank my managers in my farming operations who are doing such a sterling job making sure that I will have a business to go back to when I finally finish my time as CFU President.

To my wonderful wife Louise and our 5 precious and amazing children, thank you for supporting and encouraging me to keep going on 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.

I pray that the 2021-22 farming season will bring the abundant rains, the full dams and the bountiful harvests that we all so badly need.

May God bless you all.

Andrew Pascoe

CFU President