

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT L. P. MWANAWASA S.C**

**ON THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 2007 AFRICAN SEED TRADE  
ASSOCIATION CONGRESS**

**7<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2007 – LIVINGSTONE, ZAMBIA**

Honorable Mulyata, Provincial Minister for Southern Province

Mr. Mark Sachs, President of the African Seed Trade Association

Hon. Kabinga Pande, M.P. – Minister of Environment, Tourism and Natural Resources

Mr. Deon van Rooyen, President of the International Seed Association

Senior Government Officials

Distinguished Members of the Executive Committee of AFSTA

Participants of the Congress

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure on behalf of the government and the people of Zambia to warmly welcome you all to this country. I understand that this gathering has attracted at least 180 delegates from 33 countries from Africa and beyond. We are greatly honored by this. For those of you coming to Zambia for the first time, we invite you to come and visit us again and it is my hope that you will find this venue pleasant, exciting and appropriate for your business. For those of you visiting Africa for the first time, you are most welcome to this exciting continent.

Mr. President of AFSTA and members of the executive committee, we are grateful that you honored Zambia to be the venue of this year's conference following the one that you held in Uganda the last time. I have also been informed that your choice of Zambia was in recognition of the progress that this country has made in developing the seed industry. I wish to thank your organization for this kind consideration. I hope and trust that indeed there will be many delegates who will have learnt something while in Zambia. In turn, I am certain that Zambians will learn something from their colleagues coming from other parts of the world.

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN**

The seed industry that you are discussing at this conference is very important for the agriculture sector. The success of any agriculture industry must of course first and foremost be preceded by a successful seed industry.

For us in Zambia, this conference and its importance on agriculture is vital because the government has accorded the agriculture industry the top priority in our development effort. This is so because the vast potential that exists for this sector as reflected in abundance of land and water resources. In addition, most of our people depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and they will continue to do so for many more years. We therefore have great interest in seeing a successful seed industry in our country.

In this regard in 2004, my administration passed the national agriculture policy as the guiding policy framework for the developing sector. The national agricultural sector policy seeks to facilitate and support the development of a sustainable and competitive agricultural sector that assures food security and maximizes the sectors contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as well as earning the country valuable foreign exchange through exports.

The policy prioritizes the agriculture sector role in the provision of national and household food security, industrial development, income generation and employment through strengthening and monitoring of liberalized markets, increased participation of the private sector and diversification of production, efficient provision of agricultural services, infrastructure and development and promotion of appropriate technologies.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We in Zambia have long realized the importance of improved seed in sustaining national and household food security and other objectives of our agricultural policy that I have just outlined.

As a measure to promote the seed industry, our national research and seed policy was deliberately designed to advocate for the separation of responsibilities between private and public sectors. Public sector research for example, concentrates on basic research and research into noncommercial crops that are however important for food security. On the other hand, research into crops with commercial value like maize soybeans and wheat is being done by the private sector.

This policy framework has provided fertile ground for the private seed companies to do business. To this en, we are proud to house five seed companies in the major food crops comprising two international companies and three local companies. This is not to mention the various enterprises involved in the supply of vegetable seed. I am informed that many other seed companies are establishing their bases including some that left when policy framework was still wanting.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the seed industry in Zambia has demonstrated the great response to our policy framework and which has emphasized partnership between government and the private sector. But more needs to be done. I am happy to inform the conference that the government has made great strides toward preparing legislation to protect the rights of the plant breeders.

By providing the protection to this intellectual property, which to a very large extent is what breeding is, we are confident that many more investors in the seed industry will be attracted to our country. Once we have legislated this, Zambia will join other countries in the region such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Tanzania who have already done so.

As a country that is surrounded by eight sister republics, we find ourselves in a situation where our agricultural development does not take us very far unless we all together move forwards. We have interest in seeing progress all around because at times we face droughts and we may depend on our neighbors to supply us with part of our food requirements. Similarly, our neighbors sometimes have a need and we must step in to assist them. In deed this principle is true at the continental level and even at the global level.

For this reason, we feel in Zambia that action is needed to strengthen trade in seed. If Zambia faces a drought and she cannot satisfy her next season's seed requirement, she needs to be able to call on her sister countries to satisfy this need.

Given the sensitivity and bio security issues relating to seed, it is clear that such trading in seed can only be undertaken if the countries work together to develop harmonized seed laws and regulations not only to be the backbone of trade but also to encourage the trade.

This, as I have been made to understand, is one of the key tasks that you will be deliberating at this conference. I wish you great success in this endeavor. I want to inform you my government as well as others especially of this region look forward to receiving your recommendations which we shall study with great interest.

I have the hope that your recommendations will further strengthen the seed industry in Zambia and in the region as a whole. For the seed breeders and growers who will further be encouraged by this developments, I wish to invite you to come to Zambia to invest in our abundant land and and produce more seed for both the local and the export market.

We are blessed with 60% of the SADC surface water resources, vast arable land, good temperature and rainfall. In the centre of Africa and surrounded by eight neighbors, Zambia is a good production and distribution country for agricultural products to the rest of the continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Zambia has the right environment for both production and conditioning of seeds while our central location is important for regional and continental seed trade. We are one of the seven countries in Africa with an international seed testing association accredited laboratory for international seed trade.

We are also endowed with good human capital in seeds. Today we stand here as a net exporter of certified seeds to the common market for east, central and southern Africa. (COMESA). The opportunities are there to be grabbed.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

There are a number of challenges that the seed industry faces in Africa that may include poor infrastructure and differences in seed laws and regulations. Since you are now dealing with recommendations for harmonizing laws and regulations, what remains now is infrastructure. In this area, I am happy that in our region, good progress is being made to fix the infrastructure that will enhance trade in many commodities including seeds.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Finally I wish you every success in your congress. Once again I trust that you will enjoy your stay in Zambia. Livingstone has been strategically chosen as the venue for this congress. It is our tourist capital. Please enjoy the treasures of the Victoria Falls, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, and the surrounding parks and amenities to tell the story back home.