



Government of Malawi

STATEMENT ON TAMA CONGRESS #34

BY

**Hon. LOBIN LOWE, MP,
MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE**

AT GOLDEN PEACOCK HOTEL

JUNE 23, 2022

SALUTATION

- The Director of Ceremonies
- The Secretary for Agriculture Mr Sandram Maweru
- The TAMA President
- The guest speaker Mr Ronald Ngwira who is also the Managing Director for Pyxus Agriculture Limited
- The Chief Executive Officer for Tobacco Commission
- Senior government officials here present
- All congress delegates and farmers
- Members from the media fraternity
- Ladies and gentlemen

It is with great pleasure to be here again and interact with you TAMA Congress delegates as you meet to discuss tobacco farming business affairs and plan to improve the livelihoods of farmers.

I find the theme for this year's Congress, **“Diversification and Value Addition For Climate Change Impact Resilience”** to be very relevant considering what farmers have gone through in the current farming season; dry spells, hail storms, tropical cyclones, all in one season.

Farmers struggled to raise tobacco nurseries as most areas were dry and delays of rains meant more labour and thus costly to the farmer.

Then the cyclones came to destroy the crop that the farmer had managed to raise, it is true that nature can be cruel at times.

The Government through the Ministry of Agriculture appreciates the contribution that you, tobacco farmers, make to the economy of this country. Tobacco remains the number one export crop for Malawi and there is need for the industry to continue receiving support from government.

It is for this reason that I would like to applaud you, the TAMA President, for your efforts in campaigning for more production of tobacco in the coming season.

We have a demand that we are failing to meet and farmers need to produce just enough to meet that demand. We can easily calculate the cost of opportunities lost this year by looking at the difference between demand and anticipated supply in relation to the price on the market.

I'm glad to learn that farmers are now able to produce more than 1,800kgs of tobacco per hectare up from the ranges of 1000kgs/ha before IPS. This is one good step in the right direction as improving productivity is key to diversification as it may allow for more land to be released to other crops whilst grower maintains the same tobacco weight produced but now on a smaller piece of land.

Recent global events are teaching us that we need to intensify on value addition and stop exporting crop commodities in raw form. My ministry is working on an “agricultural and general crops act’ which will see improvements in the conduct of markets for all crops and encourage investments in production and value addition.

Currently our Ministry is working tirelessly to finalize all agricultural related bills so that these legal instruments can help in guiding every stakeholder in their implementation of agricultural activities.

Tobacco Industry Act of 2019 is also going through a review process and consultations were completed such that it is expected to be discussed in parliament very soon.

The Ministry noted that industry players, including TAMA, representing growers, were complaining about some sections in the act.

As such I would like to assure you delegates in here that the revised version will be farmer friendly so that as patriotic producers you should not feel oppressed by the same laws meant to promote you.

In this case it will be the 2022/23 crop that will be produced and sold under the revised version of the law. I know as tobacco farmers you have your propositions and as a ministry will balance the propositions to allow every player in the tobacco value chain get what they deserve.

Ladies and gentlemen, our Ministry is much aware of the negative publicity that tobacco receives globally, but as a country we know we are dealing with a legal crop whose trade is allowed worldwide. As such we will continue promoting this crop as it is very beneficial to our economy.

We will also continue exploring developments of other crops and agricultural value chains to complement tobacco so that as a country we have our eggs placed in different baskets more especially having noted how climate change is impacting on farmers livelihoods.

As the theme says, there is need for diversification and value addition which will allow our farmers have a sustainable income earning throughout the year and not just wait for the April/May harvest period. Today, Pyxus Agriculture is here to highlight on the strides they are making in diversification and value addition.

This is very commendable, you need to learn from somebody who is working in your environment so that you can easily relate. In this case Pyxus is working with you in tobacco production and they are also encouraging you to produce legumes and feed their newly inaugurated factory.

This is what the Government wants to see, supporting a farmer with production means and go all the way up to marketing and value addition, at the end of the chain we can benefit as a country through import substitution and export earnings of products from such initiatives.

Lastly, I would like to commend TAMA, for an active role you are taking in sensitizing growers about the new forces around sustainable production of tobacco for export.

There are a lot of conditions that we have to meet in order to qualify for commodity export to USA and Europe. Child Labour, Forced Labour, Deforestation and other such are vices that are against exports and I'm told TAMA is very active in sensitizing growers about these dangers and what is allowed so as to ensure the farmers and the country are compliant. Please TAMA Leaders continue encouraging growers to produce in a sustainable and compliant manner.

TAMA Congress delegates, I wish you all the best as you proceed with your meeting and I strongly believe that you will come up with timely resolutions to assist farmers in their farming business.

I thank you all for your attention.