

TOBACCO AND ALLIED WORKERS UNION OF MALAWI (TOAWUM)



P.O. Box 477
Nkhotakota, Malawi
TEL: (265) 01292288
FAX: (265) 01292288
CELL: (265) 995566831
raphaelsandramu@gmail.com

PRESIDENT : LYPTON KAPONGOLA
SECRETARY GENERAL: RAPHAEL B. SANDRAMU

29 September 2017

Dear government members of the ILO Governing Body:

I am writing to you on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of farmers in Malawi trying to make a living out of growing tobacco. We wish to express our support for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) instituting the strongest possible policies to prohibit cooperation and public-private partnerships with the tobacco industry at the upcoming 331st session of the Governing Body.

TOAWUM members and I have seen little or no benefit from social responsibility projects administered by the Eliminate Child in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT). ECLT is the primary body that receives money from Japan Tobacco and other tobacco companies and implements child labour schemes in Malawi's tobacco sector. The intent of much of ECLT's programming is not bad. It works on solutions that we are not opposed to, including crop diversification programs, savings and loan programs to help farmers get access to credit and educational opportunities for children in rural areas. These initiatives, however, insufficiently address root causes of tobacco-related child labour, which is endemic poverty among tobacco farmers. That poverty is exacerbated by contracting schemes developed by the very companies funding some projects for ECLT.

ECLT focuses on only one of the fundamental rights at work, when Malawian tobacco farmers are being denied virtually all of them. Tobacco companies, by virtue of denying TOAWUM rights to organise and enter into collective bargaining agreements, exacerbate the injustices that exist in the tobacco value chain. ECLT does not take an empowering, rights-based approach that would help communities demand a more just share of the value chain for their labour, and thus ease the poverty that drives child labour. It is a charity program focusing on the issues the industry has on its agenda, rather than local farmers.

Partnering with the tobacco industry skews the ILO's priorities in the region toward employers' priorities. As a union leader and an Alternate Titular on the IUF Executive Committee, I value the work of the ILO in Malawi and other countries, and desire to work within and through the ILO to foster conditions of decent work. As an independent union, however, it is inappropriate for TOAWUM to accept tobacco industry money and we will not engage in these corporate charity schemes. Thus, the structure of the public-private partnerships with the tobacco industry almost by definition excludes the participation of the organization representing the workers on the ground, and is an inappropriate model to fund ILO programs.

A better approach would be for the ILO to work with farmers and industry in the tripartite spirit embodied by the ILO to determine how all ILO fundamental rights could be better realized on the ground.

We hope you will stand with TOAWUM against public-private partnerships at the 331st session of the ILO Governing Body, and vote to institute the necessary policies to prohibit collaboration with the tobacco industry.

Sincerely,

Raphael Sandramu
General Secretary
Tobacco and Allied Workers of Malawi
IUF Executive Committee Member (Alternate Titular)