

The Nation's Coffee Captures World Market, Starbucks

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President Paul Kagame yesterday held discussions with the leaders of the America's giant coffee company, Starbucks Company, at the State House in Kiyovu, Kigali. The plank of the meeting was the excellent current trade relations between the United States and Rwanda, which have greatly benefited the country.

Starbucks' President, Jim Donald and his senior vice, coffee and global procurement, Dub Hay, have been in the country on a fact finding mission to strengthen their relationship with Rwandan coffee farmers. Speaking to the press, Commerce and Trade Minister, Protais Mitali who attended the meeting said, Starbucks has gradually graduated to a formidable buyer of the Rwandan coffee.

He said the company, besides, appreciating the quality of the Rwandan coffee and buying 46 coffee containers within a period of three years, Rwanda's capacity to meet Starbucks's big demand for quality coffee remains a challenge.

"In 2003, Rwanda exported only one container but before the end of this year, we have exported about 26 containers to the USA," the Minister said.

"They say they love our coffee but the challenge at hand is raising the capacity to produce enough coffee to satisfy their demand," Mitali said.

President Kagame has frequently called upon Rwandans to increase production. He ceaseless advice to the farmers is always to grow more coffee to take advantage of the ready market for the Rwandan coffee.

Mitali said the Rwandan coffee is directly shipped to the USA and not mixed with coffee from other countries. The guaranteed market Rwanda enjoys for its coffee is a result of the unparalleled quality of its coffee. Available information from leading coffee dealers indicates that it is not easy to ascertain the exact price at which Rwandan high quality coffee is bought because prices are so competitive and they fluctuate every hour but the regular price goes up to \$12.95 with the selling price at \$10.95 per 500grams.

Rwanda is said to be producing the world's finest coffee and coffee beans have a rich colour and deliciously refreshing aroma that make this particular coffee special.

Starbucks had initially carried out feasibility studies in Rwanda before it landed a deal to buy Rwandan coffee. Coffee is Rwanda's major export crop, representing 75% of export income.

The Minister said: "They promised the President that they are ready to continue buying Rwandan coffee".

Since Starbucks started providing coffee expertise and training to support this effort Rwanda now exports superior coffee that has won the 10th "Black Apron Award" and is being highlighted in 5,000 Starbucks coffee outlets during March and April and its price was hiked. African coffee beans have been fetching so little on the international market because of poor quality.

The beans are dried out in the sun while others are roasted distorting the nutritional content of the coffee beans. Fortunately, Rwandan coffee farmers have been trained the right procedure of drying coffee.

In 2005, Starbucks was reported to have bought about 312 million pounds (142 million kilograms) from 28 countries, of which 80 per cent came from Latin America, 15 per cent from Asia and just 5 per cent from Africa.