



Ladies and gentlemen,

Since its inception in 1963 the International Coffee Organization has established itself as the main intergovernmental organization for coffee, bringing together all Governments interested in tackling the issues facing the world coffee sector through international cooperation. Today, our membership includes almost all coffee-producing nations and over 80% of world coffee consumption. Our Members recognize the importance of coffee to the economies of many countries, especially in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. They also recognize the importance of coffee to the livelihoods of more than one hundred million people all over the world, many of them smallholder farmers. Coffee is a much-needed source of foreign exchange and rural income, as well as a key contributor to food security. In its more than fifty years of existence, the ICO has learned to adapt and become a convergence platform for all initiatives promoting the sustainable development of the world coffee economy.

In order to maintain its relevance in today's world, the ICO is currently finalizing a review of its activities, which will result in a new Action Plan covering the next five years. I will now share with you some thoughts about the future of the Organization.

The most important challenge we face is how to make the world coffee sector more sustainable. We must ensure a healthy environment in which the interests of commercial sectors of the global industry are aligned with the needs of the other links in the global coffee value chain, thereby achieving sustainability over time. This is the overarching mission of the ICO. In our work, we must strike the right balance among all three pillars of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. Many times, sustainability work focuses too narrowly on social and environmental questions, while the economic welfare of parts of the value chain, especially growers, is relegated to a secondary plane. Above all, sustainability must be 'growercentric', since farmers are the basis of the entire coffee value chain.

How can the ICO make a difference and help overcome the challenges we face?

One key tool in improving decision-making in the sector is the provision of accurate and comprehensive data, especially with regard to production. Efforts will be concentrated on strengthening the quality of our statistics and economic analysis. One should note, however, that our statistical work depends heavily on data submitted by Members, which, unfortunately, is often incomplete, out of date or unreliable. In order to remedy this deficiency, we intend to build up the capacity of Members to provide data by organizing workshops and providing appropriate reference materials.

A second strategic goal is to enhance the ICO's role as a forum for the discussion of coffee matters. The ICO is uniquely placed to provide a platform for dialogue between the public and private sectors, by acting as a convener, catalyst and source of reference, so as to share experiences and improve the consistency of coffee policy-making on a global level. For example, at the next session of the International Coffee Council in September 2017, which will be held in Côte d'Ivoire, we intend to highlight the question of productivity. Countries that have successfully created an enabling environment for high productivity in coffee farming will be invited to share their experience and lessons learned, so that best practices will be shared among ICO Members.

The ICO will also identify the specific actions necessary to increase the engagement of Members and other stakeholders with a view to providing better coordination of the various initiatives that address the major challenges facing the coffee sector. We must reach out and strengthen the Organization's relations with the private sector and civil society by finding fresh and innovative ways to work together.

A third priority is to address the needs of farmers for greater access to finance. In this context, I would like to mention that the Organization, in conjunction with the Inter-African Coffee Organization and the African Development Bank, is assisting in the creation of an Africa Coffee Facility to help coffee farmers in that continent. We will try to replicate this approach in other producing regions. I would urge financial investment institutions attending this Forum to consider collaborating with the ICO in financing coffee farmers. We must come together to help the smallholders who are desperate for access to finance.

A further area in which the ICO plays a key role is in the promotion of coffee consumption. This year will mark the third edition of the International Coffee Day (ICD), another important ICO initiative. Through the ICD's innovative marketing strategies, the ICO can help boost the image of coffee without the need to resort to massive expenditures.

For reasons of time, I will not be able today to present further proposals to address other important challenges faced by the world coffee sector, such as climate change, pests and diseases, gender empowerment, increasing costs of key inputs and an ageing farmer population. All of these issues will be addressed in the 5-year Action Plan that will soon be finalized.

Returning to our common objective, the sustainability of the world coffee sector, we must not lose sight of our many achievements. Having recently worked as head of another international commodity body, I feel well qualified to put this question in perspective. Coffee is further advanced on the road to sustainability than other agricultural products. However, much still remains to be done, especially in regard to economic matters.

We must always bear in mind the benefits that coffee brings to the world. Together, we can make a change and I urge all of you, in your various capacities, to work with the ICO for a sustained future for coffee. Let us all join together to find creative approaches to overcome these challenges. In doing so, the ICO is your partner and you can count on the support of this Organization, which is uniquely placed to address all issues that, directly or indirectly, involve the public sector of countries with an interest in coffee.