



Ladies and gentlemen, fellow coffee lovers,

I am honoured by the invitation to participate in the Latin American Coffee Summit 2017 and especially by the opportunity to join the annual meeting of the International Women's Coffee Alliance. The first meeting of the IWCA that I attended was the annual dinner held in Houston in 2011, during the fair of the Specialty Coffee Association of America. Shortly after that, I left the world of coffee and started to work with another fascinating agricultural commodity, cotton. Unexpected events brought me back to coffee earlier this year, now as Executive Director of the International Coffee Organization. I am gratified to see that the infant that I last saw six years ago is becoming a vigorous adult, as is demonstrated by the large turnout this week.

While women deserve congratulation on the significant advances achieved in recent years, no reason for complacency exists and much remains to be done. Even as we live in a time of abundance, millions of women all over the world remain confined in poverty and have to bear the double burden of domestic and farm work, while their contributions to the world economy are not recognized or fairly rewarded.

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, including Goal Number 5 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'.

ICO Members also recognize the importance of coffee to the livelihoods of more than 120 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.

How can the ICO help in the task of promoting women's empowerment?

The most important challenge we face today is making the world coffee sector more sustainable. We must ensure a healthy environment in which the interests of commercial sectors are aligned with the needs of the other links in the global coffee value chain, thereby achieving sustainability over time. This is the main 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. This is important for women because genuine empowerment requires a strong economic component, including greater access to productive resources (such as land, credit, pesticides, fertilisers and extension services). Above all, sustainability must be 'growercentric', since farmers are the basis of the entire coffee value chain.

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 and how this relates to the empowerment of women.

One key tool in improving decision-making in the world coffee 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. This is particularly true of statistics on the participation of women. Although scattered data exist, information on the contributions of women to the development of the world coffee sector is difficult to find. In order to remedy this deficiency, we intend to build up the capacity of our Members to provide data by organizing workshops and providing appropriate reference materials, in which the role of women will receive the attention it merits. In addition, we intend to publish a specific study on coffee and gender next year.

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 serve as 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. So, the ICO can help establish cooperation and networks among women in coffee.

A third priority is to address the needs of farmers for greater access to finance, especially in development projects. In all projects supported by the ICO, criteria for their evaluation have been revised so that gender issues must be specifically taken into consideration and due attention is given to building up the capacity of women, in terms of entrepreneurship, leadership and the development of specific skills. I would urge financial investment institutions attending this Forum to consider collaborating with the ICO in financing coffee farmers, especially women.

A fourth 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 resorting to massive expenditures. Another important ICO promotion initiative is the Step-by-Step Guide to Promote Coffee Consumption, which has been implemented in several producing countries. The development of a healthy coffee market in producing countries opens much-needed opportunities for women to improve their economic well-being and reach senior management positions.

With regard to integration of women in our work, the ICO is happy that the IWCA has been a member of our Private Sector Consultative Board (PSCB) since 2014, thereby helping to enrich discussions in this valuable advisory body of our Organization. We hope to see the IWCA continue to participate actively the PSCB in the future.

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 in general and gender issues in particular.

In conclusion, 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 the challenges facing coffee. 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 involve the public sector of countries with an interest in coffee.