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**Statement by Mr José Sette,
Executive Director of the ICO, to the
International Coffee Council**

Dear delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I know that we have a full schedule ahead of us, but I wanted to take some time to share with you my thoughts at this first meeting of the International Coffee Council since assuming the post of Executive Director.

I would like to begin by addressing the challenges facing the ICO today. In order to maintain its relevance in today's world, the ICO has just finalized a review of its activities, resulting in a new Action Plan covering the next five years, which you will consider during this Council Session. I would like to thank the members of the Working Group on the Strategic Review, under the chairmanship of Mr Aly Touré, of Côte d'Ivoire, for their hard work in preparing this wide-ranging document, which will guide the activities of the Organization in coming years.

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 correct 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 'grower-centric', since farmers are the basis of the entire coffee value chain.

In practical terms, how can the ICO make a difference and help overcome the challenges our sector faces?

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that our statistical work depends heavily on data submitted by Members, which, unfortunately, is often incomplete, out of date or unreliable.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, such as the one held earlier this week, and providing appropriate reference materials.

A second important objective 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, yesterday we had an instructive edition of the Consultative Forum on the question of productivity. Countries that have successfully created an enabling environment for high productivity in coffee farming presented their experiences 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. An important example of this spirit of collaboration is the Memorandum of Understanding with the Global Coffee Platform, which you will be asked to approve later today. Contacts have also been made with other initiatives, such as the Global Adaptation Plan, which are expected to bear fruit in the future.

A third priority is to address the needs of farmers for greater access to finance for development projects. In this context, I would like to mention that the Organization, in conjunction with the Inter-African Coffee Organisation and the African Development Bank, is assisting in the creation of an Africa Coffee Facility to help coffee farmers in that continent. In the coming months, we will try to replicate this approach in other producing regions, as well as attract new sources of project finance. 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 anxious 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 International Coffee Day (ICD), another ICO initiative that is growing in importance. This year's version introduces a photo competition, the results of which will be presented to you during this meeting. 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 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 are included in the Five-Year Action Plan that will be presented for your approval.

In these five months, since assuming the post of Executive Director, much of my time has been devoted to administrative issues. Although these are not the substance of the work of the Organization, they are essential in providing a sound base for the future work of the ICO. The most important administrative matter I faced upon my arrival was to rebuild the staff. As a result of a variety of circumstances, almost one third of the Organization's posts were vacant when I took office. Recruitment for these posts has been conducted on a transparent basis, with all announcements of all vacancies being circulated to Members, so that we can have as broad as possible pool of qualified applicants. Three posts have now been filled: Mr Sean Garden has been promoted to Head of Finance and Administration; Ms Sarah Eldred is the new Secretariat Officer; and our newest recruit is Ms Rebecca Pandolph who is responsible for the Statistics Section. All of them are well qualified and possess the qualities necessary to make a significant contribution to our work. The remaining vacant posts are in the process of being filled and we will have a complete team in the very near future.

Throughout this period, the existing staff members have worked tirelessly and made sure that the Organization kept on running, even though very short-handed. I am deeply appreciative of all their hard work in a time of instability and change. They are the Organization's greatest asset.

Although much remains to be done, the ICO can look forward to a bright future. The Strategic Review provides us with a concrete basis on which to build our future. With the continued input of all Members, the Organization is uniquely qualified to help overcome the many challenges faced by the world coffee community. I look forward to working closely with all of you.

Thank you.