



INTERNATIONAL COFFEE ORGANIZATION
ORGANIZACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DEL CAFÉ
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Climate change and coffee

Submission to the 16th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the UNFCCC (29 November to 10 December 2010) by the International Coffee Organization

The Acting Executive Director presents his compliments and has the pleasure of attaching a copy of the submission by the International Coffee Organization to the 16th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the UNFCCC. The Conference will take place from 29 November to 10 December 2010 in Cancun, Mexico and Members are invited to send a copy of this submission to their representatives at the Conference.



CLIMATE CHANGE AND COFFEE

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1. More people derive their livelihood from agriculture than from any other economic activity; the majority are self-employed subsistence farmers living in the tropics. Despite growing urbanization, 75% of the world's poor live in rural areas, and agriculture remains the largest single contributor to their livelihoods. Agricultural development is therefore of vital importance to the alleviation of poverty in the developing world, both directly (by offering employment) and indirectly (by generating jobs away from the farm and pushing down food prices). It is not surprising then that agriculture has received a great deal of attention in recent times when action for tackling climate change has been placed at the very top of the world's political agenda.

2. In turn, coffee is the most widely traded agricultural commodity produced in the tropics. Cultivated in more than 50 countries, coffee provides a livelihood for more than 25 million farming families all over the world and accounts for up to 50% of export earnings of some countries. Working towards securing a healthy world coffee sector is thus important economically, socially, environmentally and politically. The good news is that, with respect to the environment, coffee is an evergreen shrub, hence an important contributor to carbon sequestration, and is effective in stabilizing soils. It also permits the preservation of much of the original bio-diversity in planted areas.

3. In the evaluation of experts, the world coffee sector faces major challenges from climate change, including: decreasing quality as a result of early ripening; lower yields because of the effects of temperature increases on the metabolism of coffee trees; the proliferation of certain pests and diseases as temperature rises; erratic rainfall patterns may require the implantation of costly irrigation infrastructure in certain areas as well as curtail the useful life of coffee trees; and a distinct possibility that fewer parts of the world will be suitable for growing quality coffee, making global production more prone to high fluctuations. The combination of the above factors is likely to reduce the area suitable for the cultivation of coffee and raise production costs.

4. Several adaptation and mitigation strategies for coffee producers have been put forward. Short-term adaptation strategies include improved farming practices and better post-harvest processing. Longer-term adaptation includes capacity-building, improved monitoring of climate data, enhancement of soil fertility, introduction of different production models, and the development/planting of drought and disease resistant varieties. In some more extreme cases, the solution may be to diversify out of coffee or shift production to more suitable areas. Mitigation strategies include calculating and reducing greenhouse gas emissions on the farm, and making feasible the creation of carbon sinks.

5. Although adaptation and mitigation strategies have been identified, putting them into effect will require considerable time and resources, for basic and applied research as well as dissemination. Furthermore, for actions in response to climate change to be effective in the long term, they must be integrated within the overall development strategy of a whole country or even of a sector as a whole.

6. In this regard, the International Coffee Organization (ICO) is ideally suited to playing a leading role. The ICO is the main intergovernmental organization for coffee, bringing together producing and consuming countries to tackle the challenges facing the world coffee sector through international cooperation. The Organization's 76 Members account for over 97% of world coffee production and around 80% of world coffee consumption. Among other activities, it makes a practical contribution to the world coffee economy and to improving standards of living in developing countries by: enabling government representatives to exchange views and coordinate coffee policies and priorities at regular high-level meetings; encouraging a sustainable world coffee economy; and initiating coffee development projects to add value and improve marketing. Over the years, the ICO has acquired important expertise in coordinating the response of the international coffee community to the challenges it faces, including the supervision of development projects with a total value of around US\$100 million.

7. Therefore, we urge all participants in this important conference to recognize the unique characteristics of the world coffee sector and to work closely with the International Coffee Organization in preparing effective responses to the impact of climate change on coffee, and ensuring coffee is taken into account in the development of agreements and strategies on climate change.