

SEMINAR ON COFFEE AND HEALTH

STATEMENT BY DR. NÉSTOR OSORIO LONDOÑO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL COFFEE ORGANIZATION

CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA 15 SEPTEMBER 2003

In welcoming you most cordially to this important event, which brings together distinguished scientists, members of the medical profession and coffee researchers, I would like, first and foremost, to thank the Colombian authorities and, in particular, the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia, for their decisive contributions to the organisation of this Seminar on Coffee and Health.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the distinguished academics who have generously accepted our invitation and agreed to share with us the results of their investigations and studies.

During the 40 years of its existence, which is being commemorated at the same time as this event, the International Coffee Organization has actively encouraged scientific research on coffee and analysis of the effects of coffee drinking on human health. In this respect, we have developed specific programmes and projects and supported research groups and institutions, always safeguarding the independence and autonomy of researchers.

In a society increasingly aware of and concerned with the influence of food and drink on health, coffee stands out as one of the most studied and researched, but also most maligned of products destined for human consumption. Our analyses of consumer behaviour have shown that a factor limiting consumption, in particular in developed countries, is the fear that coffee is a risk to health.

Unfortunately, this is a result of negative attitudes derived from outdated scientific literature, much of which is currently being re-assessed. Certain myths have been created and are still being perpetuated because of the widespread ignorance concerning new scientific findings which contradict them. Nowadays, given the evidence of the health benefits of coffee, which is in many cases overwhelming, it is imperative to develop a policy to educate and inform consumers.

The International Coffee Organization, in association with the Institute for Scientific Information on Coffee (ISIC) which includes representatives of the European coffee industry, is developing activities for this purpose through the “Positively Coffee” programme, which was initiated in the United Kingdom and is now being extended to other countries. The aim of this programme is to provide the medical profession, nutritionists, and the general public with objective information based on independent scientific studies which show the health benefits of coffee.

If this information becomes sufficiently well-known and effective, it will be possible to dispel prejudices and create positive attitudes that could lead to an increase in consumption.

During the course of this week, an Action Plan to increase world coffee consumption will be submitted for consideration to the ICO Promotion Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Ernesto Lilly. Projects related to health form a major part of this plan. I would like to take this opportunity, Dr Illy, to express, before this distinguished audience, my appreciation and admiration of your selfless work and your enormous contribution to the defence of coffee.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and bear witness to the significant contribution which scientists like those present have made to the coffee sector and to renew my appeal both to the Governments of Member countries and to the coffee industry to give their support to these initiatives.

I hope that this seminar will be illustrative and enlightening in respect of the health benefits of coffee, contributing to the process of educating consumers.

Many thanks.