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WP Board No. 875/00 (E)

21 January 2000
Original: Spanish

World coffee conference

WORLD COFFEE CONFERENCE

(COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIRMAN)

Executive Board/
Private Sector Consultative Board
24 and 25 January 2000
London, England

NATIONAL COFFEE GROWERS FEDERATION OF COLOMBIA

Santafé de Bogotá, 16 December 1999

Mr. Celsius A. Lodder
Executive Director
International Coffee Organization
22 Berners Street
London W1P 4DD

Dear Mr. Lodder,

I have begun to give some thought to the organisation of the world coffee conference to be held in May 2001. I think we should prepare a proposal for submission to the Executive Board of the Organization at the beginning of the current year and have requested Mr. Diego Pizano to contact you for the purpose of exchanging ideas on the possible contents of the programme.

In order to attract major players in the world coffee sector, we must be able to count on the presence of political leaders and top-rate academics and businessmen. The idea would be to discuss major trends in the world coffee economy in the new millennium. At the opening session, it would be highly desirable to have a winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics (this could be Professor Amartya Sen of Cambridge University), a Head of State from a producing country and a Minister of State from a consuming country (the United Kingdom Minister of Agriculture, for instance). It would also be very useful to be able to contact high-level representatives of institutions like the World Bank, the IMF and the regional development banks. As you know, Mr. James Wolfensohn, President of the IBRD, is encouraging participation by commodity producing countries in futures markets. This would be a great opportunity to evaluate his proposals on the case of coffee. We could consider the possibility of inviting the Presidents of the New York and London futures markets to participate in a forum on the subject, with participation by representatives of producing countries.

In the case of the Inter-American Development Bank, we are in touch with Mr. Enrique Iglesias, in the hope that the institution will promote a study on the development strategies of countries dependent on the production and export of commodities like coffee. This study should be completed before the 2001 conference. In the case of the IMF, a number of experts working for that organisation have been studying trends in the terms of trade and price volatility for the main commodities of interest to developing countries. In this area, it would be worth considering the type of support that could be given by bodies such as the FAO, the Common Fund for Commodities and the UNCTAD.

Another basic theme concerns key trends in consumption. We must ensure active participation by top executives of firms such as Nestlé, Kraft General Foods, Cargill, Volcafé, Neumann Gruppe, etc. We would have to decide whether there is time for matters related to speciality coffees, organic coffee and the great question of sustainable development of coffee farming.

We are envisaging a two-day conference (possibly Friday and Saturday, so that executives coming from the United States and other countries can travel on a Thursday and be back in their offices by Monday). The conference could be organized jointly with an

entity such as Dow Jones, the Financial Times, Landell Mills or the Economist Intelligence Unit. We would have to think about an appropriate registration fee for participants, providing a sizeable discount for delegates from ICO Member countries. The budget for the event should include provision for simultaneous interpretation and publication of a book (in the four official languages of the ICO) which would include the texts of communications. I would suggest that you and Mr. Pizano could be responsible for the publication of the proceedings.

Another aspect to be considered is the venue for the event. It is not unrealistic to think that there could be as many as 250 - 300 participants, in which case the ICO Conference Room would be too small. We must also consider that, in addition to the plenaries, there could be 4-5 simultaneous meetings, which would require additional rooms. In these circumstances, we would have to consider one of the London conference centres.

These are merely a few ideas of a very preliminary nature. We need to get opinions from other countries and from the Private Sector Consultative Board. I should be grateful for your observations and comments.

I take this opportunity to wish you a merry Christmas and a very positive new year.

Yours sincerely,

(signed)

Jorge Cárdenas Gutiérrez
General Manager