

Opening speech of the IV General Assembly of the Agency for Robusta Coffee  
of Africa and Madagascar (ACRAM)

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- ❖ Mr. Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Special Representative of His Excellency Mr Faure Gnassingbé, President of the Republic of Togo;
- ❖ Distinguished Ministers;
- ❖ Honourable Members of Parliament;
- ❖ Chairman of the Agency for Robusta Coffee of Africa and Madagascar;
- ❖ Mr. Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the InterAfrican Coffee Organization;
- ❖ Researchers and scientists
- ❖ Distinguished delegates;
- ❖ Ladies and gentlemen.

The Executive Director of the International Coffee Organization regrets that he could not attend this meeting in person due to prior commitments and he has requested that the Organization be here. Therefore, I feel privileged and honoured at the opportunity to participate in the General Assembly of ACRAM and a colloquium on Coffee Research in Africa, the subject of which **‘Seed production of Robusta coffee: a pre-requisite for increasing productivity of coffee plantations in West and Central Africa’** is very telling of the challenges facing the African coffee industry.

Coffee and cocoa as well as other perennial crops is vitally important to the economies of many African countries. On a social level, these crops play an important role in retaining the agricultural population and in generating jobs in rural areas.

**Mr Special Representative of the President,**

As you know, on 17 October the world celebrated the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Africa has one of the highest levels of inequality in the world and more than 400 million people live on less than US\$1 a day. Even if poverty rates have dropped in Africa, the number of poor people has increased in absolute terms. Africa is the only region in the world where the number of impoverished people is rising.

As it promotes significant income for rural families, coffee growing constitutes one of the key achievements of National Millennium Development Goal 1: The reduction of poverty.

**Mr Special Representative of the President,**

Africa is the region with the largest number of coffee producing countries: 25 as opposed to 11 in Asia and Oceania, 12 in Mexico and Central America and 8 in South America. More than 12 million families in rural areas make a living from coffee-growing in these 25 African producing countries, which represent 55% of all coffee growers in the world, estimated to be some 22 million families.

However, production in Africa has been declining steadily resulting in reductions in export earnings. It now accounts for less than 10% of total export earnings of all producing countries in the world, compared with 21% in 1990.

Africa produced an average of 1.3 million tons a year up to the end of 1980 and was the second largest producing region after South America. Today African production is less than 900,000 tons compares with more than 1.7 million tons for Vietnam alone which only produced 60,000 tons in 1990.

Member countries of the Agency for Robusta Coffee of Africa and Madagascar (ACRAM) now represent only 1.5% of the total value generated by exports of coffee compared with 10% in 1990. Indeed, these countries produce less than

300,000 tons as a whole compared with more than 600,000 tons in 1990 and accounted for 53% of total African production in 1990 against 23% today.

Meanwhile, world coffee consumption has risen steadily from 5.2 million tons in 1990 to more than 8.9 million tons today. At this pace of growth, world consumption is projected to reach 10.6 million tons in 2020, in only 5 years' time. With world production now oscillating at around 8.6 million tons, the world needs much higher production to meet demand (2 million tons). The world coffee industry looks to Africa which still has enormous agricultural potential but faces critical challenges, including low productivity.

What are the main reasons for this under-performance? The State's withdrawal from technical training for producers who are now left to themselves with a reduction in research and dissemination budgets (for countries that still have them!). Returns have therefore fallen due to the lack of transfer of research results to producers.

#### **Mr Special Representative of the President,**

The biggest challenge is productivity. That is where agricultural research accompanied by adequate training of producers needs strong financial support. Producers across the world have no control over market prices in today's laissez faire environment. Only an increase in their productivity may help to improve their income.

**Research:** The transfer of technology to farmers generally falls under the responsibility of the government through national extension services organizations or research institutions. In any case, research and development efforts have had little impact on the socio-economic and technological development of many coffee producing countries in Africa. Many research institutions suffer from a shortage of funds. Moreover, agriculture in some countries has traditionally been overshadowed by more attractive economic sectors such as mining and oil extraction. In most countries, extension services are inadequate or poorly equipped. Substantial progress has been made in some countries but the challenge remains, as the provision of extension services is an ongoing process that requires important financial and human resources.

**Mr Special Representative of the President**, your presence, your voice and your support, symbol of your strong will and your commitment to support agriculture underscore our initiatives. Please convey our concerns regarding the challenges of the coffee industry in Africa to His Excellency the President of the Republic.

In this regard, I wish to bear witness to the availability of the International Coffee Organization to encourage all efforts to support the coffee industry in Africa in order to promote rural development and so reduce poverty.

Thank you