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**Communication by the Chair of
the International Coffee Council,
for the opening ceremony of the
124th Session of the Council**

His Excellency Mr Uhuru Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya

His Excellency Dr William Ruto, Deputy President of the Republic of Kenya

His Excellency Mr Gideon Mbuvi, Governor of Nairobi

Honourable Mwangi Kiunjuri, Cabinet Secretary for Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries & Irrigation

Honourable Peter Munya, Cabinet Secretary for Industry, Trade & Cooperatives

Mr José Sette, Executive Director of the International Coffee Organization

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Since I first visited this beautiful country in an earlier stage of my career in charge of Switzerland's peace promotion programme in the Horn of Africa, Kenya has always had a special place in my heart, and I have had the good fortune of sampling the warm hospitality of the Kenyan people. So, I am very pleased as well as greatly honoured to chair the 124th Session of the International Coffee Council in Nairobi this week.

This was brought home to me when I saw the Kenyan 100-shilling note. For those who don't know, it features the Kenyatta International Convention Centre, a statue of President Jomo Kenyatta, the first President of Kenya, and some red coffee cherries. So here we are in the convention centre – what I understand to be the most famous landmark in Kenya. We are honoured to be in the presence of the son of the first President, the current President of Kenya, H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta. What has brought us all here this week? It's all down to the value and joy that come from these beautiful red coffee cherries.

Kenya is one of the 44 exporting Members of the ICO and one of its founding Members, always actively participating and providing support. As well as exporting Member countries, ICO Members consist of importing countries, including my own home nation Switzerland where we demand top quality coffee and import from countries, including I am pleased to say, from Kenya.

I firmly believe that the International Coffee Organization, bringing together importing and exporting countries, but also the private sector, academia and international organizations is a unique and valuable forum for the international coffee community that should be not be underestimated.

For this reason, I take my role as Chair very seriously and during my term of office I am fully committed to doing all I can within my power not only to realize the opportunities that exist for the global coffee sector, but also to foster a clear consensus on the concrete solutions to the challenges facing us today and in the future. This is why over 50 years ago it was recognised there was a need for such a unique forum to exist, bringing together exporting and importing countries, made up of, but also working for, the global coffee community.

For Kenya, coffee continues to play a central role in its socio-economic development, bringing in foreign exchange, functioning as a source of food security and, of course, providing employment opportunities. I am especially mindful that women make up over half of the workforce in farms and coffee wet mills, and I am pleased to hear of the positive actions undertaken by the Government to foster gender equality in accordance with the provisions of the Kenya Constitution 2010.

But, importantly, we are also aware of the severe challenges facing coffee farmers in Kenya – a fact sadly mirrored across the globe – who are being discouraged from coffee production due to low prices. Thankfully, here in Kenya, coffee has a friend in His Excellency President Kenyatta, who has instigated a coffee regeneration programme to restructure the sector as one of the country's strategies to reduce poverty in rural communities, and is now calling for the urgent removal of all barriers that stand in the way of coffee farmers from reaping the profits they deserve.

As with yesterday's engaging Sustainability Seminar, throughout the week an important focus of our discussions will be on finding the solutions to address the future sustainability of the sector and the current price crisis faced by coffee farmers. I am pleased that the ICO Secretariat will be sharing with us the active steps they are taking in this regard, including mobilizing development partners to address the grave situation faced by coffee growers.

In preparing my speech today I came across an old Swahili proverb
“A boat doesn't go forward if each one is rowing their own way”.

Your Excellency, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, as a global coffee community, we have an extremely important responsibility to work together in a spirit of positive cooperation – now more than ever. Discussion should not stop after we have met here in Nairobi.

The Embassy of Switzerland in London, for example, has recently instigated a series of informal discussions with its fellow ICO Members to explore these very issues. We see this as just one additional forum to come together to consider possible solutions.

As Members of the ICO we all have a duty to ensure the fulfilment of the mandate of the International Coffee Agreement to foster the sustainable development of the coffee sector. We must support the ICO in its role to administer the Agreement, not only for the ever-increasing number of consumers across the world, but most importantly the more than 120 million people whose livelihoods directly depend on coffee.

I look forward to a constructive week of discussion and deliberation during our time in Kenya. In my role as Chair, I promise to provide an open and conducive environment for all, however with a clear emphasis on the need for practical solutions so that we can ensure that the coffee sector not only here in Kenya, but also all around the world, has a bright future.

Asante sana

Thank you