

International Coffee Council
142nd Session
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**Statement by the Chair of the
International Coffee Council, Mr Michael
Wheeler, made at the opening ceremony
of the 142nd Session of the Council**

Good afternoon, everybody.

Ambassador Germann,

Minister for Trade of Cameroon,

Representatives of the International Trade Centre, the World Trade Organization and other international organizations,

Distinguished ICO delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, let me express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Switzerland and to the Geneva city authorities for hosting this important meeting of the International Coffee Council. The hospitality extended to all of us has been tremendous, and I know that everyone here joins me in expressing our appreciation for the care and attention that have gone into ensuring that we have everything we need for a successful meeting.

It is a great honour for me and for the country I represent to chair this meeting and I sincerely thank my fellow delegates for the trust they have placed in me. I will do my utmost to ensure that our time together is used productively, and I encourage all of you to speak freely and, above all, openly and constructively.

We meet at a difficult time for multilateralism. Geopolitical tensions are challenging international cooperation, and the world is, in many respects, struggling to find common ground and maintain unity. But our presence here today is itself a reminder that multilateralism is possible, essential and, above all, positive. It can be done, and we are doing it.

We are here because we have a shared interest and a common responsibility. Whatever our differences may be, we have chosen to come together around the coffee sector, and I believe that

this is precisely where we should demonstrate the value of international cooperation. Today, we reaffirm the mandate of the International Coffee Organization: to promote international cooperation and collective action towards a sustainable, resilient and inclusive global coffee sector; to support transparent and efficient markets; to strengthen the capacity and economic opportunities of coffee producers and communities; and to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, technology, information and financial resources across the whole value chain.

This mandate is particularly important because coffee is different from many other commodities. Coffee is produced by millions of farmers around the world, most of them smallholders, and for many of them, it is their primary, and sometimes only, source of income. When we discuss market decisions, sustainability, climate change, productivity or trade, we are not simply discussing a commodity. We are discussing the livelihoods of millions of people and their communities, many of whom still endure real poverty and face daily challenges that many of us would find daunting.

We are fortunate to be meeting in person. We live in a rapidly changing world, shaped by digital technologies, artificial intelligence and things like cryptocurrency – all sorts of things, but increasingly virtual forms of interaction. Those developments bring enormous opportunities, but I believe that there is still great value in sitting around the same table, looking at one another in the eye and taking time to get to understand not only each other's positions, but each other as people, rather than just a face on a screen, and also to enjoy a cup of coffee together. I do believe that coffee is the social glue that keeps us all here. I am convinced that this spirit of dialogue and human connection can help us make real progress on the challenges before us.

I therefore encourage you all to approach our discussions with openness, unity and composure. Let us listen carefully to different perspectives, seek common ground where possible, and work towards solutions that strengthen our Organization and serve the interests of the global coffee community.

At a time when the value of multilateral cooperation is being tested, let us demonstrate that, through our work here in Geneva, dialogue and collective action remain possible and our main goal.

Thank you very much.