

Agriculture Donor Conference
02 June 2007

Statement of I-I-C-A, Trinidad and Tobago, by Dr Arlington Chesney,
Director of Operation and Regional Integration, Caribbean.

Mr. Chairman, Hon Innis, Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Jamaica

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency Dr. Edwin Carrington, Secretary General.

CARICOM

His Excellency Bharrat Jadgeo, President of the Republic of Guyana and
Lead CARICOM Head of Government for Agriculture

Honourable Patrick Manning, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad
and Tobago and our Host

Honorable Ministers of Agriculture and Ministers of Finance, CARICOM

Members of Funding and Technical Agencies

Colleagues of Institutions working for the Development of Agriculture in the
region

Other Distinguished Guests and Partners in Development

Good morning.

It is a profound pleasure for IICA to address this very important Donor
Conference.

I wish to extend the apologies of the Director General, IICA - Dr Chelston
Brathwaithe who unfortunately could not be here this morning. Since IICA
is an InterAmerican institution, it is mandatory for him to attend the General
Assembly of the Organization of American States. He sends his best wishes
and is confident that this Conference would achieve its expected outputs.

Mr. Chairman, IICA is particularly happy that the region has succeeded in defining the requirements and the grouping of actions through this Conference. We have come a long way indeed. Permit me to chronicle the actions that have enabled this Conference to become a reality. Actions that were fully supported by IICA, FAO and the Caricom Secretariat.

- In late 2002, when President Jagdeo asked the Directors General of FAO and IICA to assist him in the development of a repositioning strategy for agriculture in the region, both institutions immediately agreed. Naturally, we, FAO and IICA, collaborated fully with our strategic partners, particularly the CARICOM Secretariat, in the conduct of these exercises.
- By November 2003, IICA completed a comprehensive Situation and Outlook Report for Agriculture and Rural Life in the Caribbean, reviewed and endorsed by Ministers of Agriculture and major stakeholders in 2004. This represented the first step for the repositioning of agriculture and the preparation of the initial proposal for the Jagdeo Initiative itself.
- In July 2004, President Jagdeo presented a framework for the repositioning of agriculture in the Caribbean to the Conference of Heads. Consequently, the Conference of Heads requested FAO, IICA and Secretariats of CAEICOM and OECS to lead a process of national and regional consultations in order to identify and develop a package of initiatives to address three or four most binding constraints to a dynamic and competitive agriculture sector in the region.

- Between September 2004 and January 2005, IICA with funding from CTA led the process of national and regional consultations that resulted in the development of a Proposal that defined the 10 Key Binding Constraints and recommended interventions for their alleviation.

- In January 2005, this Proposal was endorsed by meeting of the agri-business sector, the forum of Minister of Agriculture and subsequently by the 2005 Conference of Heads. The proposal was then dubbed the “Jagdeo Initiative”. The conference on Increasing Investment Flows for the Development of Rice and other Agri-businesses in the Caribbean hosted by the Caribbean Rice Association founded and supported by IICA, later that year fully complemented the Initiative.

- In January 2006, in order to take stock of current situation, IICA undertook an assessment of the nature, scope and status of activities in Member States that contributed to the alleviation of the 10 key binding constraints. This report was discussed at a Special Agriculture COTED and paved the way for determining the gaps that were required to facilitate the repositioning of the sector.

- Between 2005 and 2007, FAO conducted actions leading to the development of National Medium Term Investment Programmes from which arose potentially fundable investment projects.

This silences the ‘naysayers’ who felt that the seeds of the Jagdeo Initiative for the repositioning of agriculture in the region would never bear fruit. Having done all of this preparatory work, the stage is set to accelerate

implementation of practical and viable on-the ground actions that will position agriculture to fulfill its role as an economic driver of the CSME as described in the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramus.

One might ask the question- Why has IICA been so unwavering in its support for this Initiative? The answer lies in our fundamental belief in the urgency for the need of a new agriculture. This new agriculture is a business, that encompasses the entire agri-product chain, is definitively linked to other economic sectors and includes both food and non-food products, such as, ethanol, nutraceuticals, cosmetics, medicines, landscaping, agri-tourism, etc. Expanding the traditional boundaries of agriculture will provide a larger platform to minimize rural poverty and enhance rural wellbeing. This will stem the decades of rural negligence that has been a major contributor to the urban decay that continues to plague our countries, as was recently recognized by the President of the CDB at its just concluded AGM.

The Jagdeo Initiative builds on existing programmes and initiatives particularly those of a national nature, and offers the opportunity for successes already seen in some of our communities to be adopted. It provides a workable framework within which all stakeholders, both national and regional, can develop their programmes. This Conference is expected to provide additional resources to facilitate the retooling of enterprises, a reengineering of human resources and the development of appropriate physical infrastructure to expand such benefits to other communities.

This Conference is the first distinct action that brings together the stakeholders and major development and financing organizations as we seek to (a) improve the enabling environment, (b) firmly establish the 'new'

agriculture built on science, technology and innovation and (c) enable the region to provide for its own food security and maintain its sovereignty. This is the *raison d'être* of sustainable development built on three of its four pillars. Inclusion of the institutional mechanisms that will enable the Initiative to effectively deliver is the essential fourth pillar – sometimes referred to as governance.

However, this Conference must not be seen in isolation. It is part of a process that must include the upcoming Conference of CARICOM in Washington that deals with overall regional development, and the Investment Conference for Agri-businesses scheduled for later this year.

We will work with all our strategic partners and stakeholders in a collaborative and transparent manner, with mutual respect and accountability, built on impeccable integrity and ethical conduct. IICA pledges its full and continued support to the agricultural repositioning process, improving rural life and livelihoods, enhancing regional economic development and further driving integration in the region. Reports indicate that the region has done well economically in 2006 the time is therefore most opportune for the region to provide "seed funding" to complement those of its supporters.

Thank you.