Speech of Juan Lucas Restrepo, Chair of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) at the UN Climate Summit 2014

“I believe I should begin this intervention with a couple of remarks from my country Colombia.

My first Colombian remark. Our coffee industry has a long standing tradition of success and supports the livelihoods of more than 500,000 families. If we do nothing in terms of adaptation and mitigation, global warming will in 30 years destroy their chance to produce high quality coffee in the hills where it is grown today.

My second Colombian remark. We don’t have to wait for 30 years to see farming systems collapse. During 2011 due to the climatic variability exacerbated by climate change, a million hectares of agricultural and livestock land in north Colombia were flooded and remained flooded for more than a year, hurting 100,000 families that lost everything. Relief efforts, including restoring their seed systems, helped them to get back on track. However, a few months ago the same families in the same areas were struggling again, this time because of the lack of seasonal rains. Should we just keep bringing relief or do we need to seriously deliver Climate Smart Agriculture?

I am sure many of our friends here can tell similar stories. Building from previous efforts, engaging in new ones and speeding up climate smart agriculture is a must.

For this, we need a revolution in agricultural research for development, to mobilize, reorient, strengthen and bring coherence to systems generating and sharing new knowledge around the world, to overcome systematic failings and efficiently lead to development outcomes for the poor. This revolution needs to be farmer centred and farmer led. The most vulnerable smallholder producers need to be a central focus of attention.
If agricultural innovation systems are to achieve what is required of them we must build more effective collective actions towards large scale development impacts. Partnership is a good leading indicator but often not enough. Partnership together with collective action will get the job done better and faster.

We need to recognize that, while governments are at the centre of policies, there is a big role for civil society, farmers, business and other groups to participate in the shaping and implementation of policy, and the actions needed to truly catalyse change. It is collective action by multiple groups, towards clear and agreed goals, that is the key to the future.

The Global Forum on Agricultural Research, GFAR, triggers multi-partner actions and solutions to the challenges of our time. It is a catalyst for change that builds, supports and encourages collective actions and synergies among all those involved in agriculture research, extension, education and enterprise.

GFAR brings together all sectors participating in agricultural research for development systems globally – including international institutions, national and regional research networks, farmer’s organizations, investors, and networks mobilizing NGOs, the private sector, education, advisory services and youth.

Collective action must draw on already established agricultural research for development networks that share the vision of the Global Alliance on Climate Smart Agriculture such as the Global Research Alliance on Greenhouse Gases (GRA), and the CGIAR.

The GRA was established in 2009 and is building global science networks in livestock, croplands, Paddy Rice, soils, carbon and nitrogen cycling, among other initiatives, through collaborative multi-country projects. It encompasses 42 member countries and seven global partner organizations. GRA helps build resilience and adaptive capacity of agricultural systems to sustainably meet the increasing demand for food.

The CGIAR, the pre-eminent international agricultural research consortium, comprises 15 Centres that work in close collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations. It is committing to refreshing its around 1 billion USD per year research and development portfolio, called CRPs, to better align with the goals of the Global Alliance. This includes strengthening partnerships to deliver
ambitious targets, allocating at least 60% of its funding towards research that supports climate smart agriculture, and 30% of its budget to its partners around the world.

As the Global Forum, GFAR links science and society through the processes of the Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD). This process has framed the need for international action through the CGIAR research program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security, CCAFS, as well as regional research actions on climate change and agriculture. These include regional climate change strategies for the Asia-Pacific region by APAARI, for Sub Saharan Africa by FARA, and for the Near East and North Africa by AARINENA.

The work of these research for development networks, adding value to national institutions and systems, will help tremendously in meeting the challenges of Climate Smart Agriculture.

GFAR invests in ensuring that the voices from rural communities, farmers, women and youth from around the world are heard into high-level processes such as this UN Climate Summit. The regional consultation towards the Alliance on Climate-Smart Agriculture (ACSA) co-organized by GFAR in Hanoi last June, provided these stakeholders with direct involvement and information sharing in the Alliance process, and enabled valuable South-South knowledge exchange and cross fertilization.

GFAR commits with the alliance to work across a wide range of institutions to actively support the strengthening of research and innovation actions on climate change and agriculture, in particular in developing required capacities, helping farmers to better manage risks and grassroots foresight, and linking agricultural innovation with wider societal and development needs.

Colombian farmers and any farming community around the world know that in order to overcome the impacts of climate change, they will have to combine their valuable local knowledge with the tailored solutions resulting from these partnerships and collective action."