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Welcome Address

by

**Mr. Oloche A. Edache, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative
for Africa**

for the

**Official Opening Ceremony of the Regional Training Workshop on Information
Exchange and the International Phytosanitary Portal**

FAO Regional Office for Africa, Accra, Ghana

05 – 09 December 2005

*Honourable Nii Okai Hammond, Deputy Minister for Food and Agriculture,
Ms. Sarah Olembo, Chairperson and Representative of the Inter-African Phytosanitary
Council (IAPSC),
Distinguished Delegates,
Honourable Member of Parliament – Select Committee on Agriculture,
Colleagues of FAO,
Representatives from AU member countries and other regional organisations,
Senior officials of Plant Protection Organisations,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the FAO Regional Office for Africa, the host of this Regional Training Workshop on Information Exchange and the International Phytosanitary Portal.

The collaborative efforts of FAO, the IPPC Secretariat, IAPSC and African Union to plan and organize this training workshop underscores the importance which these organizations place on the issue of effective plant protection activities in Africa.

Current advances in information and communications technology must be effectively harnessed to facilitate the process of information exchange in plant protection matters. But these technologies cannot be properly utilized if countries lack the institutional and individual capacities to operate and benefit from these modern technologies.

*Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am glad to note that this training workshop will address the issue of strengthening national capacities of contracting parties to communicate efficiently, effectively and rapidly with the IPPC Secretariat, as well as among IPPC members, and all trading partners!

Furthermore, I believe that this workshop will create the framework and network of national partners for enhanced information sharing and management of relevant information into the IPP, in a timely manner. Through coming together at this workshop, participants should establish linkages that will facilitate interaction among themselves and improve collaboration in IPPC matters.

In terms of information exchange, IAPSC, FAO and other partner agencies have assisted countries and territories over the years with computer hardware, software and other accessories and provided training on the use of these equipment and tools. FAO has also provided extensive assistance to countries and territories in gathering baseline information and data on pest occurrences through pest and disease surveys as well as pest risk analysis. The IAPSC and the FAO Plant Protection Service have been active in updating the national pest occurrence data. It is good to know that many National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) have been using these sanitary and phytosanitary information to assist in their bio-security decision making processes. In some countries the private sector has used this information in negotiating market access for agricultural export commodities.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to assure you that the FAO will continue to respond to requests for technical assistance for agricultural development programmes from member countries through the FAO Representation in each country to the extent that resources permit. The Professional Officers at the Regional Office here in Accra are available to provide technical support for programmes such as the implementation of the IPPC.

I am happy to note that participants at the workshop include senior officers who are responsible for and are involved in the implementation of the IPPC. Hopefully this workshop will help you to strengthen national capacities in border control in relation to trade facilitation, as well as updating related national policies, legislations and regulations.

Madam Chairperson,

The International Plant Protection Convention is an important instrument that has been endorsed by member countries. Such countries are therefore obliged to exchange phytosanitary information frequently. To improve agricultural development through regional trade, it is essential for many more African countries to endorse and become signatories to the IPPC.

During your stay here at the FAO Regional Office for Africa, I hope that you will find some time to interact with the Professional Officers at the FAO Annex who will be happy to provide you with information concerning the expertise that are available to assist member countries with.

*Honourable Minister,
Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen,*

Let me conclude my brief address by wishing all participants success in the training workshop.

Thank you.