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ISTA/FAO WORKSHOP ON SEED TESTING

Pokuase, Ghana, 27 – 31 March 2006

STATEMENT

BY

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Assistant Director-General/
FAO Regional Representative for Africa

Mr. Chairman, Owusu Benua

Honourable Deputy Minister of Food and Agriculture, in charge of Livestock, Mrs Anna Nyamekye

The Director, Plant Protection and Regulatory Services Directorate,
Colleagues from the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) and FAO,
Invited guests,

Workshop participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Gentlemen of the Press,

I have the pleasure, this morning, to say a few words on behalf of FAO on the occasion of the ISTA/FAO Workshop on Seed Testing which will be conducted here in Accra the whole of this week.

The workshop has brought together about 25 seed testing officials from all over Africa to acquire new skills which will enable them play a greater role in their countries' seed programmes on their return.

It has been universally recognised that urgent action is needed to create sustainable food security in the world, particularly in Africa. Towards this goal, improved seeds have been widely recognized as the main prerequisite for enhancing farm productivity and overall crop production. Seed quality as well as the monitoring and control mechanisms that ensure it, are what gives improved seed its technical credibility and the participants gathered here should consider themselves as custodians of seed quality.

As custodians, you need to be armed with the proper tools and knowledge to be able to assure farmers that the seeds that reach them in the seed distribution network are of optimum quality. When the quality of the seed is found to be faulty, often it is not only the seed cost which is wasted, but the cost of land preparation, fertilization, agro-chemicals and often most sadly, a whole season is lost.

Since the 1950's, FAO, in cooperation with its development partners, have assisted several African member states to build up their national seed programmes which are playing crucial roles in agriculture. These efforts are now being complemented with interventions in the areas of policy, legislation and specialized technical knowledge in a bid to orientate national seed programmes to confront newly emerged and emerging problems and to conform to international trends. Our partnership with ISTA in this effort has already resulted in specialized seed workshops in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Caribbean and Latin America, mostly on the laboratory detection methods for genetically modified organisms.

Mr. Chairman, the seed industry in Africa is facing serious challenges in relation to the task of providing good seeds for an ever expanding agricultural sector in order to feed the populations of Africa. The development of effective quality assurance programmes is

considered one of the priority areas that must be addressed. While a significant number of countries in Africa have quality control set ups, a large number of countries are yet to develop the requisite quality control and seed testing mechanisms to safeguard seed quality. Many interventions are required to address this. While workshops, such as this one, are very important in this regard, it will also be necessary that the resources of Africa's seed testing facilities are pulled together to form a united front in confronting common problems.

I must here compliment the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) for playing its critical role in assisting African seed quality control agencies with rules and procedures for seed testing. However, the rules do not cover some of the important subsistence crops in Africa which are important for food security. Furthermore, structures are required to enhance the rapid development of the infant African seed trade under the aegis of AFSTA, particularly in referee testing, trade inspections and the introduction of uniform seed testing methods.

During this workshop participants will be expected to discuss a draft proposal for the formation of an association of African seed testing laboratories with the expectation that they will brief their colleagues and authorities on their return to their countries. This will only be the first step of a process of consultations involving all stakeholders in all the countries. The ideas and opinions of all will be sought and FAO stands ready to assist in bringing such an association into being and will work with all member states in Africa to ensure its effectiveness for the interest of food security in Africa.

I thank the Government of Ghana for accepting to host this workshop and for making the facilities of the Seed Testing Laboratory of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture available for this workshop and ISTA for putting its technical expertise at the disposal of the workshop.

I wish to encourage you all to participate intently in this workshop, assimilate the new concepts and share also experiences with colleagues on your return. My office, FAO Regional Office for Africa, stands ready to provide all the necessary support to your work here in Accra this week.

On behalf of FAO I wish you all a good workshop.