



FAO, ICBA ink agreements to save plant genetic resources, boost food security in world's marginal areas

Abu Dhabi/Dubai, UAE, 10 March 2019 – The Director-General of the [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#) of the United Nations, Dr. [José Graziano da Silva](#), and Director General of the [International Center for Biosaline Agriculture \(ICBA\)](#), Dr. [Ismahane Elouafi](#), signed two landmark agreements today, expanding existing cooperation between the two institutions on plant genetic resources, biosaline agriculture and climate change adaptation in the world's marginal environments.

The first agreement was signed during an awards ceremony of the [Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation](#) in Abu Dhabi in the presence of H.H. Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahayan, Minister of Tolerance of the UAE, within the framework of Article 15 of the FAO [International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture](#).

Under this Article 15 agreement, the crop germplasm collection stored in ICBA's gene bank will officially become part of the [Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing](#), adding to the world's largest global gene pool of plant genetic material, available to farmers, plant breeders and scientists for the sustainable production of food from plants.

The parties signed the second agreement to collaborate in biosaline agriculture, water scarcity, and climate change adaptation, among other things, during an open day at the ICBA head office in Dubai in the presence of Her Excellency Mariam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri, UAE Minister of State for Food Security; His Excellency Dr. Bandar M. H. Hajjar, President of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group; and Her Excellency Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak, Managing Director, Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) and Chairperson of the ICBA Board of Directors.

The open day was held as part of year-long celebrations to mark 20 years since ICBA's establishment by the visionary leadership of the UAE Government and IsDB.

H.E. Mariam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri said: "Agricultural technology, or 'AgTech', is enshrined in the UAE National Food Security Strategy that aims to see the UAE among the top 10 most food secure countries in the world by 2021. Driving this exciting sector forward, my colleagues and I in the Office for Food Security have been working to facilitate the role of technology in agriculture. We have used the Government Accelerator platform to remove identified 'barriers' in the current local food production sector in order to accelerate the adoption of technology."

H.E. Mariam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri added: "The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture is leading the way in this exciting field as a major UAE food security stakeholder. The center has been instrumental in ensuring that AgTech is no longer seen as a quirky innovation on the fringes of food production, but an element that is integral to a sustainable future."

H.E. Dr. Bandar M. H. Hajjar remarked: "I am very impressed to see the progress made by the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture over the last two decades, and the hard work that has been done since the inception of this great development institution. The center, established by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the Government of the UAE and others, attests to the importance of cooperation and partnerships among different development players, and that is why the IsDB has placed partnership as one of the pillars of its Five-Year Program and the Ten-

Year Strategy. I am pleased to see ICBA providing a strong evidence to development community of the importance of partnerships in addressing the huge development challenges facing the world today."

H.E. Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak commented: "As a long-term partner of EAD, I would like to commend ICBA for the excellent work it has been doing over the last two decades in identifying crops and providing agricultural solutions to smallholder farmers and other stakeholders in marginal environments around the world."

Dr. Ismahane Elouafi said: "Plant genetic resources play an essential role in ensuring biodiversity and food security. Due to many factors including climate change, population growth, and urbanization, plant genetic resources are declining at an alarming rate. Therefore, it is important to conserve them before it is too late. We are happy to sign the treaty with FAO today; it is a significant milestone for our long-running efforts in safeguarding some of the world's most important plant genetic resources."

"With this agreement, ICBA's valuable germplasm collection will be more accessible to a broader range of users and ultimately farmers, while affording ICBA new partnerships and involvement in the global governance framework provided by the International Treaty," said [Dr. Kent Nnadozie](#), Secretary of the International Treaty, speaking from FAO headquarters in Rome. "This is another important step forward in international access and benefit-sharing of plant genetic material, which form the basis for the world's food basket."

The [Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing](#) currently comprises over 2.6 million samples of crop germplasm. Material in this vast global gene pool is exchanged around the world at an average rate of about 1,000 transfers per day to support farmers, plant breeders and scientists in developing new climate-resilient crop varieties to produce more nutritious food from plants.

The [FAO International Treaty](#) is a key international legal instrument for the global conservation, sustainable use and sharing of the benefits of plant biodiversity, which it does through its various mechanisms, most notably the Multilateral System, the [Global Information System](#) and the [Benefit-sharing Fund](#). It is also the first legally-binding international instrument to acknowledge the tremendous contribution of indigenous communities and farmers to the development and management of crop biodiversity, and calls upon all Contracting Parties to protect [Farmers' Rights](#).

ICBA's unique gene bank is home to one of the world's largest collections of germplasm of heat- and salt-tolerant plant species, with over 14,000 accessions of around 240 plant species from more than 150 countries and territories of the world, in addition to around 250 seed samples of 70 wild plant species from the UAE, the center's host country.

The open day showcased achievements over the past 20 years and presented a wide range of agri-technologies and crops that perform well in marginal conditions around the world.

Attended by more than 50 high-level dignitaries including ministers of agriculture from several countries, director generals of international organizations and senior officials from government organizations, the open day was organized with support from H.E. Mariam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri, IsDB, EAD, FAO, and the Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation.

Under its mandate in marginal environments, ICBA targets some of the poorest rural communities in regions where agriculture is the main livelihood but is failing due to salinity, water scarcity and drought and the mainstream interventions by other research and development agencies have

not produced effective and lasting outcomes. The center has so far implemented programs in over 30 countries in the Middle East, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Central Asia and the Caucasus.

**#Seeds #PlantGeneticResources #Conservation #Biodiversity #FoodSecurity #MultilateralSystem
@FAO @PlantTreaty @ICBAgriculture**

About ICBA

The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) is a unique applied agricultural research center in the world with a focus on marginal areas where an estimated 1.7 billion people live. It identifies, tests and introduces resource-efficient, climate-smart crops and technologies that are best suited to different regions affected by salinity, water scarcity and drought. Through its work, ICBA helps to improve food security and livelihoods for some of the poorest rural communities around the world.

www.biosaline.org

About FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

The International Treaty contributes to implementing FAO's mandate on food security and sustainable agriculture. It establishes rules to facilitate access and equitable benefit-sharing of crop germplasm collections worldwide for the sustainable production of food from plants. The International Treaty currently comprises [145 Contracting Parties \(members\)](#), including the European Union.

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