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991 words**

**Comments by CGIAR Chairman
Ismail Serageldin
at
“Brazil Day” MTM98
Brasilia, Brazil**

Monday, May 25, 1998

Dr. Alberto Duque Portugal, President of EMBRAPA,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today's proceedings are an assurance of our mutual interest in the maintenance of a creative relationship between the CGIAR and Brazil's national agricultural research system. Long may that relationship endure. On behalf of the CGIAR system, I thank you, Dr. Portugal, and all our EMBRAPA colleagues, for the exceptional cooperation we have experienced and for the warmth of the welcome we have received.

This is the first meeting of the CGIAR in Latin America, a region of enormous attractions and compelling challenges. Some 8 percent of the human population lives in this region which covers 16 percent of the global landmass. Latin America is home to over half the world's tropical rain forests, almost half the world's known amphibians, 43 percent of bird species, 37 percent of reptile species, 34 percent of the world's flowering plants, 31 percent of its usable runoff water, 27 percent of mammal species, 20 percent of the world's oil reserves, and 19 percent of the potential for hydroelectric power. Truly, this is a cornucopia of riches. Nevertheless, much of the region confronts the nexus of challenges derived from the continued thrall of poverty, hunger, population growth, and environmental degradation.

In February of this year, a group of Latin American directors of agricultural research met in Cartagena, Colombia, to review and revise their priorities as they confront these challenges. Securing the competitiveness of agriculture, alleviating poverty and social inequities, strengthening the entire production chain, protecting natural resources, and building strategic alliances with compatible institutions were among the goals on which broad agreement was reached. The means of reaching those goals include biotechnology, integrated pest management with an emphasis on biological control, conservation of genetic resources, soil and water

management, livestock genetic improvement, agroforestry, management and leadership of research institutions, and impact assessment. We can fully empathize with this approach. The CGIAR will be your partner in pursuing this vast agenda. We will seek to contribute to your endeavors, and we will learn from your achievements.

And today, we will learn at first hand about EMBRAPA's record.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Host Country Day which usually precedes the formal opening of a CGIAR Mid-Term Meeting has become a CGIAR tradition. It is an important event, enabling national researchers to present their experiences to their international colleagues. It is a day, as well, for an exchange of views through which new ideas, new ways of doing business, new priorities, and new relationships can emerge. It is, in essence, both a symbol and a practical demonstration of genuine partnership. This year's Host Country Day, Brazil Day, is especially significant because it takes place during the EMBRAPA's 25th anniversary. I welcome the opportunity to join in celebrating your arrival at this milestone, and rejoice that MTM98 provides for the entire CGIAR family to become fully acquainted with EMBRAPA's achievements.

EMBRAPA and the CGIAR centers have been partners for progress over the past twenty years -- from even before Brazil joined the Group. These efforts have been primarily focused on joint research and capacity building projects aimed at improving essential food crops and farming practices, conserving biodiversity, and strengthening national institutes through training and institutional reform.

EMBRAPA is a powerhouse of knowledge and scientific effort. It is widely recognized for innovation in research management and research itself. Its programs are led by a complement of over 800 Ph.Ds. Although it receives the bulk of its funding from government, it receives some 12 percent of its funding from non-governmental sources, which broadens the base of its support in the country. And, as we will see today, through our discussions and also at the "Science for Life" exhibit, its research impact has been substantial.

In pre-colonial times, *cassava* was a crop of pre-eminent importance in this country. The farmers of yesteryear were the first scientists who improved this crop, laying the foundation for cassava research that scientists in both EMBRAPA and the CGIAR conduct even today. These scientists conduct research in many other areas, as well, in terms of crops improvement, natural resource management, and in efforts to tap into the potential of molecular biology. And the tasks of research are never done. There are more questions to be asked, more to be answered. There are new areas of effort to be explored. EMBRAPA's commitment to continue its work has never been in doubt. Like any organization of its kind, however, it can obviously gain from all the support it can harvest, as it seeks to modernize its

programs, redirecting its efforts into new, complex, and potentially promising areas of research.

On behalf of the CGIAR system, and on my own behalf personally, I wish EMBRAPA the very best in its future endeavors. And I can assure you, Dr. Portugal, that we of the CGIAR are fully committed to work in collaboration with you. We value your wisdom and experience. We stand ready to learn from you, and to collaborate with you in every way we can.

Finally, I am pleased to present to EMBRAPA a scroll commemorating our recognition and appreciation of its work. The text of the scroll reads as follows:

“The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), at the Mid-Term Meeting 1998 in Brasilia, Brazil, joins in commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA). The CGIAR congratulates EMPRABA for 25 years of outstanding and invaluable work on food production, environmental protection, agroindustry, regional development, and production engineering. EMPRABA’s unremitting commitment has helped bring food security to poor people living in Brazil’s rural areas. A leader in agricultural research and training, EMBRAPA has made excellent contributions to improving essential food crops and farming practices, conserving biodiversity, preserving tropical forests, and raising the capacity of national institutes, both in Brazil and throughout the world.”

Thank you.