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Press Release

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REPRESENTATIVES FROM 33 COUNTRIES ATTEND THE 7TH ANNUAL AFRICAN SEED TRADE ASSOCIATION (AFSTA) CONGRESS

President of Zambia Addresses 180 Regional and International Delegates

NAIROBI, KENYA, MARCH 15, 2007 -- His Excellency Mr. Levy Patrick Mwanawasa, S.C., President of the Republic of Zambia opened the seventh annual Congress of the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) held from 6 to 9th March in Livingstone, Zambia. His Excellency was accompanied by the Zambian Minister for Trade and the Minister for Agriculture and Cooperatives, as well as other senior government officials.

“It is clear that the seed industry in Zambia has demonstrated great response to our policy framework which has emphasized partnership between government and private seed sector...and we feel in Zambia that action is needed to strengthen trade in seed...Given the sensitivity and bio-security issues relating to seed, it is clear that such trading in seed can only be undertaken if the countries work together to develop harmonized laws and regulations to be not only the backbone of such trade but also to encourage the trade,” stated Mr. Mwanawasa in his address.

The 7th Annual Congress attracted 180 delegates from 33 countries. Delegates included representatives from regional and international bodies such as the International Seed Federation (ISF), The International Seed Testing Association (ISTA), The Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties (UPOV), the African Organization for Intellectual Property (OAPI), the Eastern Africa Seed Committee (EASCOM), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the African Union (AU) and the Asia Pacific Seed Association (APSA).

Of keen interest to the group was a half-day UPOV workshop on the protection of new plant varieties. Apart from the presentation made by the Vice Secretary General of UPOV, other speakers also presented the situation of the protection of new plant varieties in their sub-region such as the African Organization for Intellectual Property Rights (OAPI) for 16 countries in West Africa and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). Discussions centered on the practical aspects of the protection of new plant varieties and its harmonization at regional level.

Following the UPOV workshop, ISF facilitated a half-day workshop on seed treatment. Seed treatment experts from various companies and the Secretary General of ISF presented various topics including application technology and chemical loading, operator and user safety, labeling and waste management of treated seeds, trends and new technology in seed treatment, and seed treatment: a tool for sustainable agriculture integration in the seed business.

The first topic of the Congress itself was “Towards a Harmonized Seed Trade in Africa: Coordination Efforts between the Regional Economic Communities”. Representatives of Western Africa, Eastern Africa and the Southern Africa sub-regions presented their achievements in this field and also their future programs to bring the harmonization process to an end. The private seed sector is looking forward to the implementation of the agreements reached under the harmonization and urged the regulators to turn them into reality.

Other Congress topics included “Development of Private Seed Companies in Africa – “SEEDS” (Seed Enterprise Enhancement and Development Services)”, “Highlights of the Material Transfer Agreement (MTA) of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT-PGRFA)”, “The Importance of Horticultural Seed Trade in Africa: Particularities and Appropriate Rules for Development”, “Status of Biosafety Protocol for the Commercialization of Genetically Modified Seeds in Africa” and more.

Before closing, the General Assembly confirmed that the 8th AFSTA Annual Congress 2008 will be held in Casablanca, Morocco, from 26 to 29th February 2008.

AFSTA continues to organize technical training related to seeds to build capacity of its members and dissemination of information on the progress in harmonization with a view to promoting seed trade. AFSTA is a non-profit, non-political association with a mission to promote development of seed industries and national seed associations, to facilitate farmers’ access to improved varieties. AFSTA represents the African seed industry with 67 members in 34 countries.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: The full version of President Mwanawasa’s speech is available at www.afsta.org. All the papers of AFSTA Congress 2007 are available on request from the AFSTA Secretariat (afsta@afsta.org).