

PRESS RELEASE AFSTA CONGRESS 2004

26th March 2004 – Hammamet, Tunisia

AFSTA, the African Seed Trade Association, represents the seed industries in Africa and adjoining island states. AFSTA now has 58 members in 29 countries. It is a non-profit, non-political association with mission to promote development of seed industries and national seed associations, which will facilitate farmers' access to improved seeds.

New members include:

- Seed Association of Mali (ASSEMA), Mali
- Seed Association of Guinea (APIDIA), Guinea
- Seed Association of Morocco (AMSP), Morocco
- Seed Co. International, Botswana
- Espace Vert, Tunisia
- Wolf & Wolf Seeds, Inc, USA

The 4th Annual Congress held in Hammamet, Tunisia, on March 24 – 26, 2004, attracted 170 delegates from 38 countries. Delegates included representatives from regional and international bodies such as:

ISF – International Seed Federation

OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

ISTA – International Seed Testing Association

APSA – Asia Pacific Seed Association

OAPI – African Organization for Intellectual Property

FAO – United Nation Food and Agriculture Organization

ASARECA – Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa

GTZ – German Agency for International Cooperation

UPOV – Union for the Protection of New Plant varieties

The congress was an excellent opportunity for exchanges, meeting and seed trading for the delegates in addition to the important topics discussed during the technical sessions.

The day of 23rd March 2004 was reserved for a UPOV facilitated regional seminar on the protection on new plant varieties. Other African speakers also presented the situation of the protection of new plant varieties in their sub-region such the African Organization for Intellectual Property Rights (OAPI) for 16 countries in West Africa. Interesting discussions took place mainly about the practical aspects of the protection of new plant varieties. South Africa, Kenya and recently Tunisia are the African countries that are members of UPOV.

The first topic of the congress was a comparative analysis of the African seed industry with the rest of the world seed industry. The seed industry in the sub-regions of Africa is in various stages of development as regards both seed market and regulations. It is therefore necessary that each sub-region should have a harmonized regulatory system adapted to its situation regarding certification, protection of new plant varieties, phytosanitary aspects and an official catalogue of plant varieties, among others. General strategy for the development of the African seed industry was discussed.

The second topic of the congress addressed the elements of appropriate Intellectual Property Rights for Africa. A strategy to establish a synergy between the traditional and industrialized agricultural systems was proposed and discussed with an action plan for its implementation. The action plan discussed can be summarized as the introduction of

farmers' privilege, as applied in traditional agriculture, as form of plant improvement in seed legislation, the recognition of farmers' rights as a component of intellectual property in terms of plant breeding, and the introduction of the access control to all improved plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

The third topic was about Material Transfer Agreement (MTA) provided for under the International Treaty on the Plant Genetic Resources (PGR) for Food and Agriculture and its impacts on the African seed industry. The discussion and the questions enabled participants to better understand the MTA and its relationship with the seed industry.

The fourth topic was about the trade in biotech products from genetically modified crops and seeds in Africa. Four African countries (South Africa, Egypt, Malawi and Zimbabwe) have biosafety legislation in place and the other African countries are in the process of setting up such systems. Countries that have acceded to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety must have biosafety systems in place to regulate transboundary movement of live modified organisms in order to comply with the Protocol. African countries that have acceded to or signed the Protocol up to end February 2004 include Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Tonga, Tunisia, and Uganda.

The fifth topic covered the seed market from African small-scale farmers' point of view and factors influencing access to seeds. It was pointed out that apart from the socio-economic factors, seed legislation harmonization significantly contributed to the improvement of the African farmers' access to quality seed, the basis of the development of African Agriculture, which is the mainstay of the economy of the continent.

The sixth topic presented the situation of the seed market in the Northern Africa sub-region. It was concluded that seeds exchanges between the countries in the sub-region are limited and the sub-region greatly depends on the external market for its demands on seeds. The harmonization of the seed legislations and the creation/reinforcement of national seed associations are important to facilitate the seed exchanges in the sub-region.

All the papers of AFSTA congress 2004 are available on request at AFSTA Secretariat (afsta@kenyaweb.com).

AFSTA organized in 2003 training courses in French and in English in seed technology and a workshop in biotechnology for the African seed industry. It also worked in partnership with sub-regional and international organizations to implement seed related projects.

The creation and reinforcement of national seed associations in Africa is among the priorities of AFSTA in 2004. Funding is already available for this activity from the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA). FAO would also give its support for the creation and reinforcement of the national seed associations in Eastern Africa. AFSTA continues organizing technical training related to seeds and biotechnology in 2004/2005. It would strive to increase its membership for its financial stability. It would actively participate in the seed legislation harmonization process in the sub-regions.

The General Assembly (GA) 2004 elected Mr. Raouf Ghariani (Tunisia) to be President of AFSTA and Mr. Mark Sachs to be Vice-President of AFSTA for two years. The GA also elected Mr. Dominique Gitau (Kenya), Mr. Enock Chikava (Malawi) and Mr. Hatem Quneby (Egypt) to join AFSTA Board.

The composition of AFSTA Board members for 2004/2005 elected by the General Assembly is therefore as follows:

Mr. Raouf Ghariani	President, Tunisia
Mr. Mark Sachs	Vice-President, South Africa
Mr. Guy Blaise Satsa	Past President, Cameroon
Mr. Hatem Quneby	Member, Egypt
Mr. Enock Chikava	Member, Malawi
Ms. Josephine Okot	Member, Uganda
Mr. Amadou M. Djigo	Member, Senegal
Mr. Dominique Gitau	Member, Kenya
Mr. Marcel Kanungwe	Member, Zambia
Mr. Eddy Randrianatsimbazafy	Member, Madagascar
Mr. François Burgaud	Member, France
Mr. Mark Condon	Member, USA

The General Assembly confirmed that the fifth AFSTA annual congress 2005 will be held in Yaoundé, Cameroon from 16th to 18th March 2005.

M. Raouf Ghariani
President of AFSTA

M. Justin J. Rakotoarisaona
Secretary General of AFSTA