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INTERNATIONAL CENTERS WEEK ADOPTS PROGRAM OF CGIAR RENEWAL; GENETIC RESOURCES AGREEMENT WITH FAO SIGNED

Washington, D.C., Oct. 28 -- International Centers Week, the annual Washington meeting of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, ended today ITS four-day session, adopting a program of renewal and rededication of the CGIAR to its primary objectives, alleviation of world hunger and poverty, improvement of food security, and protection of the natural resources of agriculture.

Purpose of the program is to clarify the vision of the world's largest international research group, reform its governance and operations, and secure stable support for its mission.

Earlier in the year, the CGIAR had faced a crisis caused primarily by a diminution of funding. The implicit breakdown of support for the 17 international research centers of the CGIAR demoralized scientists, threatened the integrity of research, and eroded the system's capacity to serve as an effective tool of development.

Responding to this crisis, the CGIAR embarked on a stabilization program to settle its finances in 1994 and 1995 and launched a series of reform measures intended to create a new, reinvigorated CGIAR in 1996.

Donors responded to the program with additional funding for 1994 and 1995, thereby stabilizing the Group's finances for both years. For 1995, donors pledged about \$270 million in support of the research agenda for 1995 agreed at the meeting. "The stabilization is now in place," said CGIAR Chairman Ismail Serageldin, "but this is only a means, not an end. It give the system a breathing space to prepare for the next step in the renewal process, a High Level Ministerial Conference scheduled for early February 1995 in Lucerne, Switzerland.

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A highlight of International Centers Week was the signing of the CGIAR-FAO Agreement on Plant Genetic Resources. With this step, the CGIAR brought its genebanks -- considered to be among the world's largest plant germplasm collections for agriculture -- under the auspices of the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). "This step ushers in a new phase in international cooperation for the conservation and use of plant genetic material," Chairman Serageldin said. On behalf of FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf, FAO Representative Mohamed Zehni welcomed the signing of the agreement as an important step in the realization of the FAO Global System on Plant genetic Resources: "The conclusion of the agreement demonstrates the CGIAR's continued commitment to work with FAO in the task of ensuring food security for millions of people in the developing world."