NEW INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVE TO DEVELOP DISEASE-RESISTANT BANANAS

Washington, Oct. 28—The Common Fund for Commodities (CFC) and the World Bank today signed an agreement to support research to develop more disease-resistant banana varieties, for both export and local consumption in major banana-producing countries. The Common Fund for Commodities will contribute 3.566 million US dollars over the next five years.

The project aims at breeding new, disease-resistant banana varieties, through conventional and non-conventional techniques, and at developing better disease management practices to reduce excessive pesticide use.

The project will involve cooperation between the Common Fund, the World Bank, the Inter-Governmental Group on Bananas of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Fundación Hondureña de Investigación Agrícola, Honduras, and participating donors of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

The project agreement was signed today on the occasion of International Centers Week, the annual CGIAR meeting, by Budi Hartantyo, Managing Director of the CFC, and Michel Petit, Director of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Department of the World Bank in the
presence of representatives of other CGIAR members who are strong supporters of banana research within the CGIAR.

"The new initiative could help improve the income and health of hundreds of millions of small farmers and consumers in poor countries, in particular. Bananas and plantains are the fourth most important staple food in the developing world," CGIAR chairman Visvanathan Rajagopalan said. "Better disease resistance means less harvest losses for both domestic food and cash crop production, and less use of costly and potentially hazardous pesticides." The project includes development of improved management technologies for the major banana disease, Black Sigatoka.

It is anticipated that three of the 18 international research centers of the CGIAR undertaking research to improve banana and plantain production will be active participants in this new international program: the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), the International Network for the Improvement of Banana and Plantain (INIBAP), and the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources (IBPGR). Other banana research programs worldwide are expected to participate.

The Common Fund for Commodities is an intergovernmental organization based in the Netherlands financing sustainable commodity development in developing countries. It was established within the framework of the North-South dialogue in the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).