



ICAC 77th Plenary Meeting

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire 2 - 6 December 2018

Report of the Chair *ad interim* of the Standing Committee





Hon. Chairman, distinguished delegates to the 77th Plenary Meeting of the International Cotton Advisory Committee, observers and guests.

On behalf of the members of the Standing Committee and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the government of Côte d'Ivoire for hosting the 77th Plenary Meeting of the ICAC. As you know, Pakistan hosted the 75th Plenary Meeting so I am very much aware of the enormous efforts by the Organising Committee to ensure that this meeting will not only be successful for the delegates but will also provide an opportunity to showcase this beautiful country. I therefore congratulate the Organising Committee for producing such a magnificent event.

It is becoming a common occurrence that the Chair of the Standing Committee leaves to take up another appointment before the Plenary Meeting and this year, our Chair, Mrs Claudia Fontana Tobiassen has unfortunately had to leave to take up an appointment in Stockholm, Sweden. I would therefore like to officially record our thanks to her for her service as an officer of the Standing Committee and her efforts in leading the ICAC over the past year and especially in this critical year where the organisation is undergoing some major changes. I would also like to thank the government of Switzerland for their support of the ICAC during that period.

In accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the ICAC, the Standing Committee at its 555th Meeting unanimously endorsed the nominations of myself to serve as Chair of the Standing Committee from the end of this 77th Plenary Meeting to the end of the 78th Plenary Meeting. The Standing Committee also endorsed the nominations of Ms. Maha Zakaria, Economic and Commercial officer, Embassy of Egypt to serve as first vice Chair, and Mr. Selman Kurt, Commercial Counsellor at the Embassy of Turkey, to serve as second vice Chair.

It is perhaps worth noting that the three of us come from three prominent cotton producing countries from three different continents.

I am able to fully support these nominations and I am confident that we will make an effective team to help drive the ICAC forward over the ensuing year.

The Past Year

The past year has seen some major changes in the direction of the ICAC. This time last year we appointed a new Executive Director. He outlined to the Plenary Meeting his vision for the ICAC. It would be fair to say, that he has wasted no time in putting this

vision into place. He has worked hard on preparing a strategic plan to revitalize the organization and serve the member countries in a better manner.

Since the last Plenary Meeting we have seen the addition of one important and crucial member of staff, a Director of Communications. Mr. Mike McCue. Mike was formally the editor of Cotton International and the Cotton Yearbook and is well known within the cotton industry. Since his appointment, we have seen a growing presence on social media especially on Twitter and LinkedIn. We have also seen the introduction of a monthly newsletter – ‘Cotton Matters’– which has enabled all of us to keep track of the numerous events attended globally by the ICAC Secretariat on our behalf. This is a very important first step in the building of the ICAC community. If you haven’t followed the ICAC on Twitter and LinkedIn, then today is the time to do so.

We are using technology to ensure that the ICAC is at the forefront of digital innovation. For the first time we have used an event app for the Plenary Meeting. But perhaps the most visible indication of a new ICAC has been the new website. The website was launched in October and demonstrates a new, vibrant, forward-looking ICAC. Visitors to the site should find it easier to find information about cotton. We also plan to introduce an interactive database portal by the end of 2019.

More on the Strategic Review

On his appointment, the Executive Director proposed a strategic review of the organization. That review was agreed at the Plenary Meeting last year in Uzbekistan and has been ongoing for nearly a year, with the organization benchmarking itself against other international commodity bodies, questionnaires sent out to stakeholders and finally, resulting in a Strategic Away Day for members of the Standing Committee in July.

An independent consultant was hired to assist in the process which resulted in a strategic plan for the next three years covering eight major areas. It might not be surprising to learn that the first major area and priority was membership. Membership has been decreasing year on year for the last five years. Retention as well as the recruitment of new members will therefore form the thrust of the ICAC’s efforts over the next year. To do this we really need to show the value of being a member of ICAC to both existing and potential new members. The reality is that as we recruit more members to be part of ICAC, it becomes cheaper for all of us and therefore I ask each and every member to look at those neighbouring countries who are either producing or importing cotton and who are not a member of ICAC and use your influence to persuade them to join.

It is important to note that the ICAC represents all countries in the cotton and textile value chain. Therefore, it is important that we also develop a value proposition for those countries who are also primarily consuming countries.

Perhaps the biggest key to our success is the development of key partnerships. Over recent years, these have been diminishing and it is perhaps now, with a new, rejuvenated ICAC, that we should revisit and revive old relationships and develop new ones. These partnerships should include United Nations bodies and international organizations such as FAO, ITC, UNCTAD, ILO and WTO, but should also include international organizations covering the private sector as well as national cotton and textile organizations. The role of the private sector in the ICAC is crucial. To enable this to happen we shall be consulting with other international commodity bodies and producing a suitable structure that gives them value and enables them to engage with the ICAC.

I would also just like to touch on one other important area within the Strategic Plan. That is cotton research. It is our wish that our close relationship with ICRA should be strengthened and made more effective so that all cotton researchers can benefit from this vast pool of experience and knowledge. We currently have four regional networks of cotton researchers situated in Asia, the Mediterranean and Middle East, Southeast Africa and South America. It has been shown that those countries that have well-developed cotton research facilities produce greater yields and better quality cotton and therefore every effort should be made to develop scientists from all major cotton producing areas. However, you will immediately see that there is one area that is not covered – West Africa – and it is our intention to establish a cotton research network in this region within the next couple of years.

There are many other items the Strategic Plan covers but I just wanted to cover the main areas for you today. The Strategic Plan will be made available on completion of this Plenary Meeting once it has been approved by the Steering Committee. The Strategic Plan has involved many hours work and will be continually reviewed and built upon each year. It has been approved at the 557th Meeting of the Standing Committee and I therefore strongly recommend it to the Steering Committee for ratification at this Plenary Meeting later this week.

Finally, let me end by saying a few words about our host country. Côte d'Ivoire is the 4th largest producer of cotton in Africa, and it is right that at a time when cotton production and consumption is increasing that we use this opportunity to put the spotlight on Africa and the potential of Africa. The theme of this Plenary Meeting is "Cotton Challenges: Smart and Sustainable Solutions" and the agenda developed in conjunction with the Organising Committee looks at those challenges that affect the African continent in particular challenges such as climate change, improving yields, developing revenue from cotton by products, how small farm holders can use drones and robotic technologies, combatting pest resistance to *Bt* cotton and pesticides, and how farmers can produce the quality of cotton that spinners desire. In addition, this year's 'World Café' will explore the challenges in growing organic cotton and how that may affect policy perspectives.

This year we are starting to put in effect changes to the way the Plenary Meeting is run so that we can work towards a more productive and efficient meeting. This will not happen in one go but will be a gradual process and a process driven by you, the delegates who I hope will respond to the survey that will be sent to you after the Plenary Meeting.

Appreciation

My thanks once again to the government of Côte d'Ivoire for their hospitality in their beautiful country and to all the many people that formed the Organising Committee.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to my fellow Standing Committee members in Washington DC for their support in the work of the ICAC over the last year. This support is not just limited to turning up and contributing at Standing Committee meetings but also in allowing their embassies to be used for meetings and most importantly in being part of the various ICAC Subcommittees. In particular, I would like to thank Mr. James Johnson, the representative of the United States of America for Chairing the Sub Committee on Budget and Mr. Rado Wang, the delegate from Taiwan, who Chaired the Strategy Sub Committee. But every Committee and Subcommittee needs members of staff who service and support them and my thanks and gratitude go to the ICAC Secretariat for the excellent work over the past year.

Finally, at its 553rd Meeting, the Standing Committee accepted an invitation from the government of Australia to host the 78th Plenary Meeting in 2019. On behalf of all of us at the ICAC, I would like to convey to the government and people of Australia our sincere appreciation and thanks for the invitation and we look forward to visiting you around this time next year. Thank you and thank you Côte d'Ivoire for making this year's Plenary Meeting happen.

Ali Tahir, Pakistan
Chair *ad interim*, Standing Committee