



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

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP: PUSHING
COTTON'S BOUNDARIES
Brisbane, Australia

2-5 December 2019
Tour: 6-7 December



Honourable Chairman, distinguished delegates to the 78th Plenary Meeting of the International Cotton Advisory Committee, observers and guests.

On behalf of the members of the Standing Committee and the Arab Republic of Egypt, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the government of Australia for hosting the 78th Plenary Meeting of the ICAC. We are all very much aware of the enormous efforts by the Organizing 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 Organizing Committee for their dedication and commitment in producing such a magnificent event.

Last year, the Chair of the Standing Committee remarked that it was becoming a common occurrence that the Chair of the Standing Committee leaves to take up another appointment before the Plenary Meeting, and again this year, our Chair, Mr Ali Tahir has unfortunately had to leave to take up an appointment in Pakistan. I would therefore like to officially record our thanks to him for his service as an officer of the Standing Committee and his efforts in leading the ICAC over the past year in what has been a period of huge change for the organisation.

In accordance with the rules and regulations of the ICAC, the Standing Committee at its 561st meeting unanimously endorsed the nomination of myself to serve as Chair of the Standing Committee from the end of this 78th Plenary Meeting to the end of the 79th Plenary Meeting. The Standing Committee also endorsed the nominations of Mr. Selman Kurt, Commercial Counsellor at the Embassy of Turkey, to serve as First Vice Chair and Mr. Anshul Sharma, Commercial Counsellor at the Indian Embassy, to serve as 2nd Vice Chair.

I am delighted to fully support these nominations and I am looking forward to working with them and my colleagues of the Standing Committee to continue the ICAC's momentum as it continues to evolve into a more effective and dynamic organisation that can fully represent the needs of cotton and textiles in the global economy.

The Last Year

Last year at the 77th Plenary Meeting in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, we approved and adopted a three year Strategic Plan starting on 1st July 2019 aimed at revitalizing and growing the organisation. We continue to look at all the functions of the ICAC to ensure that they are appropriate for a modern, dynamic organisation in the 21st century. Part of that review at our annual Strategic Away Day was to revisit and update the ICAC's Mission, Vision and Values. In addition, we discussed how we can ensure continuity amongst the Officers of the organisation so that we can avoid the situation where the Chair is posted before the end of his or her appointment in the office. After this year, we are proposing to the Steering

Committee that the core officers consist of the First Vice Chair, the Chair and the Immediate Past Chair. In addition, we are looking at what changes we can put in place to ensure that our Plenary Meetings become more streamlined and effective — and some of those ideas you will see implemented during this Plenary Meeting. Furthermore, we are continually looking at how we can add value to ICAC membership so we can attract new members and retain the members we already have. Part of this initiative is to ensure that the staff regularly visits Member governments whether in Washington or abroad so they can understand the individual problems that Members have and can offer advice and propose initiatives to assist them. This effort is already having an impact, as we are delighted to welcome Nigeria back into the ICAC family — there are further 11 countries that have expressed an interest in learning more about being an ICAC Member. Some of those countries are here today as observers and hopefully; we shall be welcoming them as Members in the coming year.

Since the last Plenary Meeting we have introduced another major initiative: our very first Annual Report. This builds on how we communicate with different stakeholders, but most importantly, it not only provides a snapshot of the health of the organisation and insight into all of its activities, but it is also an excellent marketing tool for prospective Member countries and also to potential partners and donors who wish to engage with the ICAC on its projects. So, please look at it on the ICAC website and pass the link to your colleagues so that they can gain insight into all the ICAC activities.

Last year, the Chair reported that we are leveraging technology to ensure that the ICAC is at the forefront of digital innovation. Last year we introduced an event app for the Plenary Meeting as well as a new website. We also mentioned plans to introduce an interactive database portal to access statistical information on cotton and those plans are still ongoing and hopefully, will come to fruition next year. However, perhaps the most exciting use of technology are the two projects developed by the ICAC to increase yields. Both of these projects are due to be officially launched next year and I know that the Executive Director is going to speak in more detail about them. I will not steal his thunder, but you all will get an opportunity to view them, play with the technology and comment on how we can improve the technologies to ensure that they are of major benefit to all ICAC Members.

Perhaps the most exciting event from the past year was the launch of World Cotton Day at WTO headquarters in Geneva on October 7th. This was an ICAC initiative supported by our partners at the WTO, UNCTAD, ITC and FAO. Together, we all planned the launch in Geneva which was a huge success, attended by over 700 people including 12 Ministers. Moving forward, the C4 countries have taken the initiative to propose to the United Nations that 7th of October be officially reserved as World Cotton Day on the permanent UN Calendar. The ICAC, through its Private Sector Advisory Panel, will now coordinate efforts to promote World Cotton Day each year, and we encourage everyone in attendance to make their own plans to celebrate the world's most important natural fiber 10 months from now.

Let me say a few words about our host country. Australia is the third-biggest exporter of cotton after the US and India but it is well known that Australia is suffering from one of the biggest droughts in its history so it is right that we come together to offer our support to the cotton industry when it is suffering.

The theme of this Plenary Meeting is 'Global Leadership: Pushing Cotton's Boundaries'. The agenda, developed in conjunction with the Organizing Committee, reflects the impact of emerging technologies. All the sessions have been developed around the Plenary theme. The open sessions focus on issues such as traceability and how that may affect national policy perspectives; ground breaking disruptive technologies and their all-round impact on the cotton sector; challenges of germplasm exchange and breeding varieties for high yields and superior fiber quality; responding to climate change, and exploring in this year's 'World Café' how to use big data and artificial Intelligence (AI) in the ICAC App and the use of immersive learning through the ICAC Virtual Reality (VR) training programmes. The breakout sessions focus on topics such as robotics, innovations and building community resilience; better management practices for high quality fibers; meeting the needs of the textile industry, and sustainability issues also with reference to resistance management of insects and weeds to technologies.

Appreciation

My thanks once again to the government of Australia for their hospitality in this beautiful country and to the Organising Committee and the Conference Manager Jann George who — along with the ICAC staff and in particular Caroline Taco — has done an outstanding job.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to my fellow Standing Committee members in Washington for their support in the work of the ICAC over the last year. This support is not limited to turning up and contributing at Standing Committee meetings. In addition, I would like to thank the Chairs and members of all the ICAC committees for their continued commitment and enthusiasm.

In particular, I would like to recognise the work of the Chair of the Private Sector Advisory Panel Mr Peter Wakefield, who not only has travelled the world from his home in Shanghai to attend meetings in Washington, but also has represented the ICAC on implementation of the ePhyto project. The PSAP is undergoing a major transformation as we look at ways in which we can engage with the private sector in a more productive manner, and Mr. Wakefield has been working with the Executive Director to overhaul the composition on the PSAP to ensure that the very best individuals from the private sector representing national associations are included. In addition, its role has been expanded to take on the functions of the International Forum for Cotton Production, which disbanded earlier this year. This means that the PSAP will now work through the ICAC and its Director of Communications to develop initiatives aiming at increasing demand for cotton and countering the many myths and the 'fake news' that is often communicated about cotton. All these changes were approved by the Standing Committee at its 561st meeting and it is hoped that this will encourage a strong and meaningful dialogue between governments

and the private sector as we tackle issues that impact the global cotton and textile value chain.

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 their excellent work and support over the past year.

Finally, at its 554th meeting, the Standing Committee accepted an invitation from Europe to host the 79th Plenary Meeting in Seville, Spain in 2020. On behalf of all of us at the ICAC, I would like to convey our sincere appreciation and thanks to the EU for their invitation and we look forward to visiting you next December.

Thank you all, and thank you Australia, for making this year's Plenary Meeting happen.