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PRESS RELEASE

April 4th, Palais d'Egmont,
Place du Petit Sablon 8, 1000 Brussels (09:00 - 13:00)

High-level Panel to Discuss Investment in African Agriculture

Tanzania's President Kikwete and Commissioners of the European and African Unions will join a high-level panel in Brussels to discuss investment opportunities in African agriculture. The panel will meet against a background of increasing confidence about the prospects for African agriculture and the continent's food system.

2014 is the African Union's 'Year of African Agriculture and Food Security' and, on Friday April 4th, a high-level panel of top decision-makers from Africa and Europe will meet in Brussels to discuss opportunities for investment in African agriculture and ways of improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. The panel's main underlying purpose, however, will be to focus international attention on the rapid transformation now taking place in food production and distribution in Africa.

The high-level panel includes Tanzania's President Jakaya Kikwete, European Commissioner Andris Piebalgs and African Union Commissioner Tumusiime Rhoda Peace, as well as the Rwandan Minister of Agriculture and several senior figures from the private sector and public institutions. The event is organised by the CTA (the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation), in partnership with the European Union, the ACP Group and the African Union, and will be hosted by the Belgian Government.

Entitled 'Realising the Promise of Agriculture for Africa's Transformation,' the High-level Panel has been timed to coincide with the 4th Africa-EU heads of State Summit. It aims both to highlight the most significant opportunities for transforming agriculture in Africa and the role of partnerships among government, the private sector, smallholder farmers and investors to achieve win-win outcomes.

Modern African agriculture and food systems are changing rapidly, bringing the potential for the continent not only to feed itself but also to grow a surplus to help ensure global food security. Africa's agricultural GDP has been growing at an annual rate of 4 per cent since 2003, encouraging experts and political leaders to agree that now is a time of great excitement and optimism.

"African agriculture and food systems are undergoing significant transformations," says Michael Hailu, the Director of CTA. "Africa now has the potential both to feed itself and to grow a

substantial surplus for export, which will not only improve the continent's balance of payments, but also help tackle global food insecurity."

Fulfilling Africa's potential, however, will require a major effort from both within and outside the continent. Political leaders are aware that sustaining the momentum of transformation is as important as attracting further investment. A key factor too will be ensuring that decisions are taken from a sufficiently broad perspective.

"We need to look at the needs of smallholder farmers as part of food systems and supply chains and consider agricultural productivity, food security and nutrition in the context of both overall economic development and social stability," says Michael Hailu.

"CTA's main purpose has always been to make a difference on the ground and, in particular, to improve food security and the livelihoods of smaller farmers. Governments, development partners, NGOs and private investors are now paying more attention than ever before to agriculture as an engine for socio-economic growth. It is time for us all to redouble our efforts and play an active role in the process of transforming agriculture in Africa to achieve its true potential for food and nutritional security and the prosperity of millions of citizens."

The prevailing mood of optimism, however, cannot mask the fact that formidable challenges remain. Africa still has the highest rate of undernourishment in the world – one in four people are without enough food and, in sub-Saharan Africa, 54 million children under the age of five lack the level of basic nutrition necessary for proper health and development. Furthermore, shifts in demographics and global economic trends, together with environmental challenges, such as climate change, are aggravating existing problems with potentially devastating consequences for Africa.

"This is why the High-level Panel and the whole discussion about transforming African agriculture is so important," says Michael Hailu. "What is happening in African agriculture and food systems has the potential to reshape the global food system for the better."

The Panel will be followed by a special event in the Palais d'Egmont in Brussels to celebrate CTA's thirtieth anniversary.

"We are proud to celebrate three decades of service to agricultural and rural development in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific," says Michael Hailu. "We will mark this important milestone by applauding the invaluable support the European Union and the ACP Group have given to CTA over the years as well as by recognising the contribution of our many partners in our efforts to advance food security, prosperity and sustainable resource management across the ACP."

To mark the anniversary, CTA will launch a book entitled, *Stories of Change: Transforming Lives through Agricultural and Rural Development*.

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