



Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very pleased to greet you and to welcome you on this very important occasion of launching the “Khalifa International Prize for Date Palm”. We take great pride that this prize is truly international in scope and aims at rewarding excellent efforts of prominent researchers, growers, and centers in the field of date palms. We are also very pleased that this prize will help emphasize the importance of the date palm in the life of individuals and societies.

I am particularly pleased to welcome our special guest, His Excellency Jacques Diouf, Director General of FAO. His presence and his membership in the Board of Trustees of the Khalifa Prize signify the prize’s international reach. We greatly appreciate His Excellency’s, and FAO’s, strong support and interest in the date palm as an important component of food supply in the world.

But first, allow me to offer our great thanks and gratitude to the benefactor of this distinguished prize: The President, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahayan. We

appreciate his generosity and value his successful efforts to promote comprehensive development in the UAE and the region. His efforts represent for us a guiding example and a great incentive to carry out our responsibilities. We hope that we will always be worthy of his confidence and true to his expectations as we work diligently for a prosperous future.

We wish to thank His Highness the President for his wise decision to establish this international prize. We appreciate his leadership and his interest in promoting continued improvement in the agriculture and production of date palms. We value his commitment to making the United Arab Emirates a prominent international center for all aspects of research, development and production that are connected to this blessed tree.

Ladies and gentlemen, the “Khalifa Prize for Date Palm” underscores an important fact: that the date palm occupies a very special place in the history and traditions of our region, and in particular, that this important tree is at the heart of agricultural development in the United Arab Emirates. This agricultural development was led by the founder of our country, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahayan, may God receive him into his paradise. Sheikh Zayed was a wise and visionary leader. He was greatly

interested in the palm tree, always seeking better ways for its cultivation, always helping to develop new forms and varieties. He was well aware of the important social and economic value of the palm tree and was committed to reaping all of its benefits.

We are fortunate that His Highness the President, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed, shares the values of his father and continues his vision. We thank him for his strong support of all initiatives that benefit the United Arab Emirates and its people.

I also take this opportunity to express our thanks and gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahayan, Minister of Presidential Affairs. We thank him for his efforts in support of this prize and greatly appreciate his interest in making it an important and prominent means for improving date palms throughout the world. I also acknowledge with thanks, Sheikh Mansour's great efforts and contributions in all fields of development in the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Allow me on behalf of myself, and on behalf of all members of the Board of Trustees of the prize, to express our pride and pleasure on having been entrusted by His Highness Sheikh Khalifa with the responsibility of the prize. We look

forward to our task and pledge that we will do all we can in order for this prize to always be, as envisioned by His Highness Sheikh Khalifa, successful in promoting excellence and supporting successful initiatives throughout the world:

- * It will be a prize that will exemplify UAE's contributions to high achievement and excellence in the field of date palms; it will also help show not only the important place of the date palm in the history and traditions of society, but its place in its future, as well.
- * It will be a prize that supports research and rewards the efforts of prominent individuals and centers involved.
- * It will be a prize that promotes wider societal interest in the palm tree on the national, regional and international levels.

We in the United Arab Emirates are very pleased with what we continue to achieve with the date palm. I want particularly to mention the very successful cooperation the UAE University has with the UN Development Program and with FAO to develop our research and development facility in Al-Fou'ah. FAO will provide the operational and technical management of this important facility for the next four years in an excellent example of international cooperation in the