

STATEMENT BY
DR. THE HONOURABLE CHRISTOPHER TUFTON ON
THE OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF
DR. VICTOR M. VILLALOBOS AS DIRECTOR GENERAL
OF THE INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR
COOPERATION ON AGRICULTURE (IICA)

Dr. Victor Villalobos, Director General Elect, Dr. Chelston Braithwaite, Director-General Emeritus, Excellency Jose Miguel Insulza, Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Dr. Oscar Arias Sanchez, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, Distinguished Members of the Mexican Delegation here present, Staff Members of IICA, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I execute the pleasurable duty of swearing in Dr. Villalobos as the 10th Director General of IICA, permit me to make some brief comments. Firstly, as Chairman of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA), I would like on behalf of the Board and all 34 member countries of this illustrious organization, to register our heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Chelston Braithwaite, out-going Director General for his eight (8) years of service to this institution, in the capacity as Director General, and 28 years' service overall to this 67 year old organization. Dr. Braithwaite, you have worked

tirelessly to position this institution as the premiere organization advocating the cause of agriculture and rural development in this hemisphere. You have helped to make IICA a household name in agricultural circles, and you have executed your job with the utmost efficiency and professionalism. I dare say the sector in the entire hemisphere has been the better as a result of your efforts. As you go on retirement, we wish you God's speed and we look forward to your continued advice and contribution to agriculture in the hemisphere, as Director General Emeritus.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I recall the satisfaction that it was in Montego Bay, Jamaica, at our 15th Meeting of the Board of IABA on October 30, 2009, that Dr. Victor Villalobos was elected by an overwhelming majority as Director General of IICA for the next four (4) years. The margin of your victory underlines the fact that you enjoy wide support across the hemisphere. This should augur well for a successful tenure as Director General. Indeed, this kind of support is going to be crucial as you take on the enormous challenge of leading this noble institution, at a time when agriculture is literally at a cross roads in the hemisphere. The world food crisis, coupled with the current global economic crisis, has once again placed the spotlight on the agricultural sector. Global climate change also portends significant

challenges for the agricultural sector, and adaptation measures must now be mainstreamed in our agricultural practices, if the sector is going to remain resilient. The pace of urbanization in our hemisphere will not only threaten the viability of rural economies, but will contribute to urban decay, and underlines the need for a concerted and sustained effort at rural development. In the face of these challenges, so many of our member countries do not have the capacity by themselves to address them. There is, therefore, a real and urgent need for greater collaboration in building capacity throughout the hemisphere for food security, rural development and sustainable agriculture. This in turn places a great obligation on institutions such as IICA to roll out a new model of technical assistance and development cooperation.

I believe that at our Ministerial Meeting in Montego Bay, we have set the agenda and constructed the framework within which this new cooperation can be engendered. As the new Director General, Dr. Villalobos, you have the enormous opportunity to lead this charge. On behalf of the Board of IABA, we pledge our support. If I may be allowed to speak more parochially, we from the Caribbean region, look forward for even greater levels of support from IICA, as we battle the challenges of climate change,

food insecurity and the serious threat to agriculture and rural life posed by the erosion of our traditional export markets.

I wish you a very successful tenure, and I have no doubt you will justify through your leadership of this organization, the enormous confidence that the hemisphere places in you.