



CIHEAM

International Centre for Advanced
Mediterranean Agronomic Studies

Scientific Consultation and High-Level Meeting on Red Palm Weevil Management

29-31 March 2017 - FAO, Rome, Italy

**Statement of Mr. Cosimo Lacirignola
Secretary General of the CIHEAM**

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In October 2015, the CIHEAM and the FAO have decided to strengthen their partnership.

Your Excellencies, Mr Graziano Da Silva, Ladies and Gentlemen, Messieurs, dear colleagues of the CIHEAM, it is an honour for me to assist to the set up of a multiregional platform for the management of the red weevil that is so necessary and urgent.

I am particularly proud of the work accomplished by the CIHEAM Institute in Bari that has been very much involved in this initiative and its implementation.

Since nearly 20 years, today brilliantly managed by Maurizio Reali who is present here, the Institute of Bari devotes its research and works to the elimination of the red weevil. Dear Director, researchers, project managers, I congratulate you once again for the quality of this work that is today recognised and valued.

Our two Organisations have had the occasion to work together on several projects for over thirty years.

However, when faced with huge challenges in the Mediterranean and the Near East, including the one that has brought us together today, we have decided that our cooperation and our synergistic work in favour of agricultural and rural development in the region must be enhanced.

I would like to thank the Director General, Mr José Graziano da Silva, for having established this Partnership and I also welcome the action of the director of the FAO regional office, Mr Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, who has been following up and developing this Partnership.





It is not possible to give the list of all joint activities that are currently being implemented by the FAO and the CIHEAM. I will therefore only mention a few of them that are related to the themes addressed during these three days of discussions:

We have published the *Mediterra Report 2016*, which is entitled “Zero Waste” for the Mediterranean, addressing the challenge of improving food security through the struggle against triple waste: natural resources, food products as well as knowledge and traditional know-how.

In fact, over these past three days here in Rome we have been addressing the struggle against the waste of knowledge and finding solutions. You have recalled it several times, it is the insufficient implementation of phytosanitary standards, the lack of an effective prevention strategy and insufficient measures to monitor information that account for the failure of the efforts to contain this pest and the damages it causes.

Today, we are struggling against the waste of our knowledge and we are creating a new space for the sharing of solutions.

We are combining our experiences and together we are seeking to face this crisis that is strongly affecting the two Mediterranean shores.

Every year, the red weevil causes millions of dollars in economic losses. In the Gulf countries and in the Middle East, millions of dollars are spent each year to cut down contaminated trees. In Italy, in Spain and in France, associated with the loss of revenue, the costs related to the management of this pest, its elimination and the replacement of contaminated palm trees amounted to approximately 100 million Euros in 2013.

A containment programme is no longer an option but rather a necessity.





This programme requires an early detection system, efficient warning systems and a research system that is in line with territorial needs but also sustainable networking that will enhance complementarities and synergies.

We must not forget to mobilise the local traditional know-how that are often discarded if not discredited.

Today, with new technologies, digital innovation and hyper connection we have certainly managed to save time but we have not necessarily moved towards the right direction.

We must not forget that dates have been cultivated for thousands of years and the cultivation of this sacred fruit has been protected and preciously transmitted through generations.

Today, our mission consists of ensuring the transmission of knowledge and skills to the new generations so that in 5,000 years, our descendants continue to eat dates produced in our regions...

The Mediterranean region contains a high biodiversity of plant species that must be protected for social, economic and environmental reasons. A sustainable production strategy is therefore more crucial than ever to protect the entire region from phytosanitary threats.

If we don't prevent the progression of the red palm weevil, production will suffer heavily. This could lead to the phenomenon of economic migration of communities living near oases towards urban areas.

Pests in animals and plants can indeed seriously compromise food security with serious economic and environmental consequences in some territories.

This is reason why animal and plant health is an important theme of the CIHEAM Action Plan for the Mediterranean that revolves around 4 main interconnected pillars:



1. Protecting the planet “by struggling against triple waste”
2. Food security and nutrition “by boosting sustainable agriculture and food”
3. Inclusive development “by investing in new generations and fragile territories”
4. Crises and resilience “by contributing to tensions management”
 - Population mobility and migrations.
 - Climate change mitigation and adaptation solutions.
 - Animal and plant health.
 - Agricultural markets.

Indeed, we can all imagine and understand the relation between plant and animal diseases, global warming, insufficient natural resources, dependence on food imports, population displacement... The last ministerial conference of the CIHEAM held in September 2016 in Tirana revolved around this issue.

On this occasion, I would like to highlight the fact that the issue of distress migration is at the heart of the priorities of Mediterranean countries and that both the CIHEAM and the FAO strive to address the root causes of distress migration by investing in projects that promote the resilience of rural households and fishermen.

We wish to enhance our joint activities with partners such as the FAO in order to contribute to improving knowledge on phenomena, identifying solutions that ensure better living conditions for populations and that contribute to rural economic growth by particularly integrating adaptation strategies to environmental constraints.

Political awareness, research and production of studies, the implementation of training courses, the sharing of experiences and the development of specific programmes are essential to put rural and agricultural dimensions of migration in the Mediterranean at the heart of debate.

There is another project that I would like to mention and that could be a best practice to replicate.





With the FAO, we have organised several seminars on the *Xylella fastidiosa* bacteria that is a harmful pathogen that attacks crops, ornamental plants, forests or natural plant species.

Following the appearance of the *Xylella fastidiosa* associated with the rapid decline of the olive tree in the Puglia region (Italy), North African and Near Eastern countries expressed their deep concern, claiming extensive information and training on the *Xylella fastidiosa* and the syndrome of rapid decline of olive trees in order to prevent the introduction and spread of this pest.

With the support of the Near East Plant Protection Organisation (NEPPO) and the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO), the FAO, the IPPC and the CIHEAM Institute in Bari (IAM-B), we have organised workshops to share recent data and train local stakeholders in the latest technical protocols for early surveillance, diagnosis and control.

We have shown that concrete solidarity exists in the agricultural Mediterranean world and that it is not so complicated to work intelligently at the service of the common good and of populations.

Lastly, I would like to say a word about a recent event that took place in Bari on the Mediterranean diet. This was a technical workshop on the development of Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainability of the Mediterranean Diet in the Mediterranean region.

This joint workshop organised by the FAO-CIHEAM was aimed at advancing the call for action launched in 2016 for the revitalisation of the Mediterranean diet and launched at the First World Conference on the Mediterranean Diet in the framework of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.

This meeting helped to strengthen collaboration between the main stakeholders in order to consolidate the role of the Mediterranean diet as a lever to improve the sustainability of food systems and consumption patterns in the Mediterranean region in order to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda for this region.





These successes have been achieved through a collaborative spirit and the effective mobilisation of available and intelligently shared human and technological resources.

I would like to warmly congratulate our partners on these projects and express my gratitude and pride to the CIHEAM agents who are not only skilful but also true activists and excellent ambassadors of a Mediterranean based on solidarity.

Cosimo Lacirignola
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