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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **27th EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF THE COUNCIL OF MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL OLIVE COUNCIL Hammamet (Tunisia), 11–16 July 2016**

The Council of Members of the International Olive Council, an inter-governmental organisation established in 1959 to administer the International Agreement on Olive Oil and Table Olives, held its 27th extraordinary session in Hammamet, on the invitation of the Tunisian authorities, from 11 to 16 July 2016. The session was chaired by Uruguay, with Albania as Vice-Chair.

**Tunisia**, as a founding member of the IOC since its creation in February 1956, has the second largest olive-growing area in the world and more than 800 million olive trees, of which 99 per cent are used for oil extraction. Olive growing is one of Tunisia's main agricultural activities. Sixty per cent of the country's farmers work in this area and olive growing accounts for 30 to 40 million work days a year. The olive growing sector has a robust industrial infrastructure, with more than 1 700 olive oil processing facilities, 15 refineries, 10 olive pomace oil extraction units and more than 40 packing plants, thereby contributing to slowing down the rural exodus and generating revenues. With average annual production exceeding 176,000 tons over the last ten crop years (2005–15), Tunisia, which exports 80 per cent of its production, is the second global exporter after the European Union.

The 27th extraordinary session of the Council of Members was inaugurated by Sâad Seddik, the Tunisian Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries; Zakaria Hamed, Minister of Industry; and representatives of agricultural and industrial inter-professional organisations in Tunisia, in the presence of approximately 70 representatives from most of the 16 IOC Members, including the European Union, and from various observers (Palestine, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM)).

During the session, the **IOC working group on the revision of basic texts** adopted the work presented by the Executive Secretariat on the new organisation chart, the four-year recruitment plan, the Financial Regulation and the Rules of Procedure, which will help adapt the Organisation to the provisions of the new International Agreement on Olive Oil and Table Olives of 2015, which is set to enter into force on 1 January 2017 and to further simplify administrative and financial procedures.

The specialised committees (economic matters, promotion, technical and financial) met on 12 and 13 July.

In relation to **economic matters**, the Council of Members examined the provisional data submitted by the member countries for the development of world figures on olive oil and table olives to be adopted in November 2016.

The Members were also informed of the economic activities planned by the Executive Secretariat, in particular the international study on consumer behaviour in IOC member and non-member countries; the harmonisation of customs headings for the main categories of olive oil; and the creation of an observatory of world olive growing.

With regard to the **promotion** of the consumption of olive products, the Council of Members examined the results of the promotion campaign conducted in Japan since July 2015 and took note of the excellent media coverage that it was receiving. The progress achieved in the promotion of the IOC trade standard with the Japanese and Chinese authorities was also discussed, together with the objective of recognising a tasting panel and a physico-chemical olive oil testing laboratory in both countries.

The IOC Executive Secretariat recalled that grants would be awarded to member countries to organise activities for the *World Olive Day*, on 26 November. A call for tender would be published to that end.

With regard to **olive oil chemistry** and **standardisation** in the trade of olive products, the Council of Members took note of the activities carried out since the 103rd session of the Council and in the first half of 2016: methods of analysis of olive oils and olive pomace oils, organisation of the 16th IOC Mario Solinas Quality Award (in two editions), harmonisation of standards on olive oils and table olives (in relation to the CCFO and ISO 34 SC 11), work on the organoleptic assessment of olive oils and table olives, organisation of ring tests to assess the competence of physico-chemical testing laboratories and tasting panels, and the programme for the quality control of the olive oils and olive pomace oils sold in import markets.

The Members agreed to the revision of the trade standard, in particular the maintenance of the ethyl ester (EE) limit at  $\leq 35$  mg/kg, the inclusion of the method for the determination of peroxides, the revision of the fatty acid limits for C17:0, C17:1 and C20:1 and of K270 for refined oils and olive oils; harmonisation with the designations of the new Agreement; the update of the references to the Codex Alimentarius and ISO standards and the revision of Section 10 on labelling. They also adopted the revision of the certificate for the recognition of laboratories to include different modalities (type A: Quality; type B: Purity; type C: Contaminants), simplifying the award of the certificate in all countries.

Regarding the international extra virgin olive oil competition for the IOC Mario Solinas Quality Award, the Executive Secretariat proposed holding only one edition of the award in 2017, which would however contain a specific category for oils from countries of the Southern Hemisphere. The Council of Members also agreed to give its official patronage to national institutional quality competitions organised by the competent authorities in accordance with the rules of the Mario Solinas competition.

In the area of **research and development** and **environment**, the Members noted the progress of the activities carried out in that area since the 103rd Session, the work plan for 2017 and the future guidelines for 2017–2019.

In particular, they considered the state of progress of the project to increase the economic yield of the genetic olive resources through the creation of pilot demonstration nurseries, actions to strength cooperation between the IOC and CIHEAM, the development of a certification system for nursery olive plants, a protocol for the creation of an IOC-recognised international collection, the situation of the international collections of Marrakech and Izmir and the conditions for IOC participation in COP22 to present a statement on the positive environmental impact of the production (and therefore consumption) of olive oil.

In relation to **training** and **specific operations**, the Council of Members took note of the different courses organised and/or receiving IOC funding, in particular PhDs, the expert university course on virgin olive oil tasting (University of Jaén), and international extension and training activities – namely the interregional seminar held in Teheran (Iran) in May 2016.

The Executive Secretariat recalled that the grants awarded for the 2016 financial year would prioritise activities relating to olive tree diseases, namely *Xylella fastidiosa*, the environmental footprint and setting up physico-chemical testing laboratories and tasting panels in member countries that have not yet been awarded IOC recognition.

On Wednesday 13 July, the Tunisian National Office for Olive Oil had organised a side-event entitled "*Regards croisés sur l'oléiculture mondiale*" (Perspectives on the Global Olive Industry). The Minister of Agriculture was represented at the event by his head of staff, Mr Abdallah Rabhi, to welcome, together with the Director-General of the Tunisian National Office for Olive Oil, Mr Chokri Bayoudh, the main actors in the Mediterranean olive oil sector.

In order to present an overview of the opportunities, challenges and threats for the global olive oil sector, the ONH had invited Mr Luis Folque (Chairman of the IOC Advisory Committee, and President of Casa do Azeite and the AIFO in Portugal); Abdessalem Loued (President of the chamber of Tunisian olive oil exporters); Teresa Pérez Millán and José Pont (Interprofessional association for olive oil and Asoliva – Spain) ; Filippo Legnaioli, Tullio Forcella and David Granieri (CIA Toscana, Federolio and Unaprol - Italy); Emmanouil Karpadakis and Panyiotis Karantonis (Terra Creta and Esvite - Greece) ; Abdelmajid Ezzar and Abdelaziz Makhloufi (UTAP and CHO - Tunisia); and Ummuhan Tibet (UZZK - Turkey).

On Thursday 14 July, the delegations were invited on a **technical visit** of various olive groves – under traditional, integrated and superintensive farming – (Ben Chrifia, Biolive and Azzaitouna), the Water Temple and Zaghouan archaeological museum and a tourism and environmental project (Ksar Ezzit). A sightseeing tour was organised on Saturday 16 July, taking in Bardo Museum, the archaeological site of Carthage and the village of Sidi Bou Saïd.

At its **plenary session** on 15 July, the Council of Members adopted eighteen decisions presented by the Executive Secretariat.

The Members also approved the recommendations made by the IOC Advisory Committee on Olive Oil and Table Olives at its 47th meeting (on 16 May in Teheran, Iran), which were: to pursue the harmonisation of Codex Alimentarius standards and international customs coding with the IOC international standard; Continue to study the organoleptic assessment method and other complementary methods; establish a protocol for arbitration between recognised laboratories in order to ensure greater legal certainty, and oversee compliance with the code of commercial ethics; create a task force to develop an olive oil traceability mechanism and present the outcome of its work to the IOC Advisory Committee; determine an optimal use-by date for products intended for end consumers; and task the IOC with studying the changes in consumer behaviour and the maximum residue limits (MRLs) for pesticides and heavy metals and organising a sensorial testing workshop to harmonise and improve the "panel test" and strengthen its legal certainty.

The Council of Members also welcomed the initiative presented by the Tunisian delegation to create an international centre to train olive oil tasters, targeting French speakers.

In the afternoon, the College of IOC Senior Officials – made up of Abdellatif Guedira (Tunisia), Executive Director since January 2016, Jaime Lillo (Spain) and Mustafa Sepetçi (Turkey), Deputy Directors since 1 July - , the heads of delegation of the member countries and the Executive Secretariat team in Tunisia, were received in Tunis by the Head of the Tunisian Government, Mr Habib Essid, former senior official, Executive Director and Chairman of the IOC, who took note of the outcomes of the 27th extraordinary session of the IOC.

Back in Hammamet, the Executive Director of the IOC and the Secretary-General of the CIHEAM, Cosimo Lacirignola, signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** with a view to strengthening the joint activities of the two institutions on olive growing and the protection of olive trees, in particular to enhance their collaboration on projects in which their competencies and expertise are complementary and to organise joint training research and technical cooperation activities, seeking to promote the exchange of experiences and information to better address the new challenges of Mediterranean olive growing. Planned actions this year include the joint organisation of an international seminar on *Xylella fastidiosa* in October 2016 in Bari (Italy) to enable the participants to observe the development of the disease in situ.

The signing ceremony of this Memorandum was followed by an **official dinner**, which was attended by the Tunisian Ministers of Agriculture and Industry, by various representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and by the Tunisian delegate of the CIHEAM.

The Executive Secretariat thanks the Tunisian Authorities and the National Office for Olive Oil for their warm welcome and the excellent organisation of the meetings.