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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to address you today in the beautiful city of Córdoba to celebrate World Olive Day. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Spanish Minister of Agriculture, the Córdoba authorities, and the International Olive Council for their warm welcome and today's activities.

As the EU representative, I am delighted to be here during the harvest season, as our farmers see their efforts rewarded after a year of dedication and care. The European Union is the world's leading producer, consumer, and exporter of olive oil, but our olive cultivation encompasses more than agriculture; it is integral to our cultural heritage and culinary traditions. It shapes landscapes, enriches the socio-economic fabric of Southern regions, and sustains vibrant rural communities.

I'm sure this is a sentiment we all share in this room, across the IOC membership. We all bear the responsibility to protect and preserve this ancient heritage. Olive oil has been produced in Córdoba and other Mediterranean regions for millennia, and we must collaborate to ensure its future. The Declaration of Córdoba presented today marks an important step towards this goal.

We face challenges, such as climate change and emerging pests and diseases. Climate change disrupts global olive production with events like prolonged droughts, wildfires, and torrential rains. Meanwhile, *Xylella Fastidiosa* threatens to decimate trees, diminishing diversity and organoleptic qualities of ancient varieties, and impacting rural livelihoods.

I commend the IOC for promoting EU-funded research projects focused on sustainability in the olive oil sector. I am confident that our productive collaboration will prosper for many years.

The European Union is committed to supporting the olive sector and invites all of you to join us in this mission.

Thank you once again for your attention and presence.