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For immediate release

Expanded Crop Genebank Opens in Lebanon

These global drylands crop and forage genetic resources and the world's largest collection of crop wild relatives are public goods, freely available to strengthen food security and fight climate change.

A new agricultural genebank containing a wealth of plant genetic resources from across the world's dry areas was inaugurated today in Terbol, Lebanon by ICARDA, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas.

The ICARDA Genebank for the Drylands holds in trust a unique collection of plant genetic resources of the world's most important drylands food crops and forages, ready for distribution to crop breeding programs and other users worldwide.

ICARDA Director General, Dr. Mahmoud Solh explains that the Terbol genebank is one component of the center's new genetic resources architecture that has been put in place to increase access to these 'public goods' plant genetic resources.

"As today's commercial crop seed industry concentrates its efforts on a narrow genetic base, these public goods genetic materials from the ICARDA collection and other CGIAR international research centers are a strategic resource to ensure global food and nutrition security. The genebank provides collections that all countries and global breeding programs can use to develop new crop varieties that have improved yields, and can assist resource poor farmers in the fight against food insecurity and climate change," he says.

The genebanks hold in trust the ICARDA active and base collections of 154,000 crop genetic resources. These materials are also safe-duplicated in several other locations including a second copy at Svalbard Seed Vault in Norway.

The active collection is located in genebanks in Terbol, Lebanon and at ICARDA's research station in Morocco. From these locations, plant genetic material is distributed to requestors worldwide. The ICARDA genetic resources team also transfers know-how on plant genetic resource conservation and use to professionals working in national genebanks.

The active collection is safe-duplicated at two levels: in partner genebanks of international CGIAR research centers, CIMMYT and ICRISAT, in the Swiss and Indian national genebanks; with a copy also sent to Svalbard Seed Vault in Norway. ICARDA's original base and active collections are located in its Tel-Hadia genebank near Aleppo, which continues to function but is not currently accessible.

The crop genetic resources collection in the new Terbol facility is unique. It contains rangeland and forage species, faba bean and grasspea, and is also a treasure of crop wild relatives from across the Fertile Crescent – the world's largest collection of wild cereals including barley, wheat, lentil and grasspea.

Dr. Ahmed Amri, ICARDA's Head of Genetic Resources, explains that crop wild relatives are especially important for food security in resource poor countries and on marginal lands. "These native rangeland species and crop wild relatives are a powerful weapon to fight climate change that threatens their agricultural systems. Wild crops have robust properties – including heat, cold and

drought tolerance, resistance to crop disease and pests – that can be bred into existing food plant varieties to make them more resilient and higher yielding. They can also be used directly for restoration and rehabilitation of degraded eco- and farming systems. ICARDA continues to enrich this collection of genetic resources through adaptive traits targeted collecting missions, and some 11,000 new crop wild relatives samples were added to the collection in the past four years,” he says.

The genebank is part of ICARDA’s Terbol Research station, which has been a 30-year partnership with Lebanese Agricultural Research Institute (LARI). Dr. Michel Afram, President Director General of LARI, comments that this research cooperation has been instrumental in improving the conservation and use of Lebanon’s plant genetic resources, to enhance food security in the country over the past decades.

The ICARDA genebanks are a leading global crop diversity collection, providing freely available public goods. Of the 2.5 million samples held in 447 of the world’s major crop genebanks¹, ICARDA ranks first or second in the number of genetic resources it provides – for barley, chickpea, faba bean, *Medicago*, *Lathyrus*, lentil, *Pisum*, *Trifolium*, and *Vicia*, and ranks third for wheat resources. 48% of global faba bean accessions, 51% of all lentil resources, 29% of all *Lathyrus* in these collections are conserved by ICARDA.

ICARDA’s gene bank expansion has been funded and supported by the Lebanese Government/ Ministry of Agriculture and Lebanese Agricultural Research Institute (LARI), CGIAR Consortium, Global Crop Diversity Trust, The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, and GIZ, the German development agency.

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Notes to Editors:

- The ICARDA International Genebank for the Drylands Lebanon genebank contains genetic resources of rangeland and forage crops, faba bean and grasspea, the world’s largest collection of wild relatives of barley and wheat, lentil and grasspea.
- The ICARDA Morocco genebank contains genetic resources of cultivated wheat, barley, chickpea and lentil.

About ICARDA

The International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) is a global agricultural research organization working with countries in the world’s dry and marginal areas to deliver sustainable systems solutions that increase productivity, improve rural nutrition, and strengthen national food security. ICARDA is a member of CGIAR, a group of 15 international agricultural research centers that produce public goods science. www.icarda.org www.cgiar.org

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¹ Ranking based on figures from [Genesys plant genetic resources portal](http://Genesys.plant.genetic.resources.portal), 447 major global genebanks, excluding collections in India, Iran and China.