

**Statement by Mr. James Godfrey, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the
International Potato Centre, on the occasion of World Food Day 2007 and the
Launch of the International Year of the Potato.
New York, 18 October 2007**

Thank you for your kind introduction.....

It is a great honour for me to be here today to help launch the International Year of the Potato. I introduce myself to you as a potato farmer from the United Kingdom, from the area of Lincolnshire one of the most favoured areas in the world for potato growing. I am also chair of the Board of Trustees of the International Potato Center. I am passionate about potatoes and that is why I am so delighted to be here at the launch of the International Year of the Potato.

Potatoes originated in the high Andes close. There are 8 cultivated species of potato but it is only one of those species, *Solanum tuberosum* that was taken to Europe 450 years ago and from there to the rest of the world. Potatoes rapidly became a staple crop and food supply and of course many people when thinking about potatoes recall the potato blight epidemic that wiped out the potato crop in Europe in 1845 and caused widespread starvation and migration of so many people from Ireland. Unbeknown at that time was the vulnerability of the crop to late blight, since then we have selected and bred resistance into modern varieties, but it is a lesson learnt of the fragility of food supplies. What many people do not realise and why it is so important that the United Nations has declared 2008 the International Year of the Potato is to recognise the significance of potatoes and the great contribution potatoes have played in feeding the growing world population and in the social and cultural heritage to many communities. World potato production is about 320 mT per year and this makes potatoes the most important root and tuber food crop in the world. Its food productivity per hectare of land is about 4 times greater than that of cereals and the tubers can be harvested before the crop reaches maturity thus providing an important role in food security which is so critical to many families. Potatoes are the fastest expanding food crop in sub-Saharan Africa (a 225% expansion in the last 10 years). India has set a goal to double potato production in the next 5 years. And the People's Republic of China has included potatoes in their 11th 5 year plan thus recognising the role of potatoes to both food security and their rural social reform program.

The mandate of the International Potato Centre, known by its Spanish Acronym CIP, is to help reduce poverty and hunger in the developing world through research and the application of that research on potatoes and sweet potatoes. We are funded by governments and foundations and we work in over 30 countries through partnerships with governments, research institutions both in the industrialised and developing world, with agencies and farmer groups.

We recognised the importance of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and we have committed to helping to achieve some of the Millennium Development Targets where CIP can contribute significantly. Those include Targets 1 and 2, of halving the proportion of the world's population living in extreme poverty and hunger; and to Targets 5 and 6, reducing the under 5 mortality and maternal mortality;

and to Target 9, to the integration of sustainable development and the reversing of environmental resource loss; and to Target 11 to improve the lives of slum dwellers; and to Target 13 to help address the special needs of the Least Developed Countries; and to Target 18 to contribute to making available the benefits of new agricultural technologies. These are all central to CIP's work throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America.

There are an estimated 5,000 varieties of native potatoes across the Andes, CIP has 4,200 of these in our genebank making it the largest collection of potatoes in the world and under an agreement with the United Nations we hold these potatoes in trust for humanity. I would just like to share with you one of our recent success stories in Peru. Three years ago 6 communities created a 12,000 ha potato park near the Inca capital of Cusco in the high Andes. Communities such as these have lost many of their native potatoes. We at CIP have returned to this potato park over 400 native varieties of potatoes to the potato park, which they are now growing in their fields providing food and what is equally important is regenerating the individual cultures associated with potatoes in these communities. In the last 7 years, CIP has repatriated 25% of the native potatoes in our genebank back to more than 30 communities in the Andes. This scale of repatriation of native varieties back into the centre of origin of a crop is unique in the world and is making a substantial and sustainable improvement to the genetic biodiversity in the farmers' fields. It is my hope that other crop genebanks around the world will follow this lead to increase genetic diversity and food security to feed the ever growing world population.

On behalf of CIP, and our partners around the world, we thank the United Nations for declaring 2008 the International Year of the Potato and we ask everyone to join in with us to celebrate this year to raise the awareness of this most important crop to feed and improve the standards of living of so many people around the world.

The declared Mission of the International Year of the Potato (IYP) is to increase awareness of the importance of the potato as a food in developing countries, and promote research and development of potato-based systems as a means of contributing to achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Strategy for IYP implementation is to engage partners in developing synergies and initiating combined and mutually beneficial and supportive actions to take advantage of the multiple opportunities that will be provided by the IYP.