

CLOSING REMARKS

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The Minister for Agriculture, Hon. William Ruto, cabinet ministers, permanent secretaries, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am pleased once again to address this auspicious gathering as I did couple of days ago - this time as we witness a momentous occasion, the closing ceremony of the 6th Conference for the Global Consortium of Higher Education and Research for Agriculture (GCHERA). Painful as it is to part, dear participants, I am certain that the lessons acquired in the forum will remain in our memories for a long time to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, to claim that the conference was merely an eye-opener is indeed an understatement, for a lot has transpired since the opening ceremony four days ago. We have, during the conference, come to terms with experiences met in virtually all corners of the globe. We have heard of many success stories resulting from the input of committed agricultural researchers and scholars. We for instance followed keenly strategies that were put in place to raise student enrolment in a number of agricultural institutions of higher learning in various parts of the world. We were guided through the rigorous process that led to some agricultural training institutions raising their status into major producers and exporters of agricultural products, thanks to painstaking resilience and a focused approach to research. The conference also reached at several resolutions, key among them being the urge to universities to involve all stakeholders at all stages of research; the call on universities to improve methods of disseminating information to farmers; the need for universities to increase interactions with policy makers; the importance of involving stakeholders in curriculum development; building up of a new infectious diseases workforce, and, equally important, encouragement of student mobility. On the other hand, the conference also served to bring us closer to the grim reality facing the agricultural sector all over the world. That the youth in most parts of the globe are increasingly steering clear of agricultural courses in favour of disciplines they deem more lucrative is no longer a whisper. Likely, our deserts are expanding by the day and weather patterns getting unpredictable, making agricultural investment a risky business undertaking, and worsening the already pathetic food security situation in many parts of the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is imperative that we all join hands together – under our umbrella of hope, GCHERA – to counter the said challenges if the ordinary farmer, and the entire agricultural sector, is to continue being relied upon for human survival. Agricultural universities and research institutions have a great role to play here – providing leadership informed by research tailored to address problems of the day. As it has been reiterated on several platforms, the agricultural sector will for ever remain moribund if our professors restrict their working lives to delivering lectures and papers without practically getting in touch with happenings at the grassroots level. Let us all rise to this challenge, dear participants – we must show the path, we must lead the way.

As I conclude, I wish to once again extend my sincere thanks to GCHERA Executive Committee, the Local Conference Organising Committee and the various sub-

committees for the arduous work that culminated in the remarkable success we have seen in the running of this conference. Equally, I thank the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Alliance for Green Revolution, DAAD and Kenya Institute of Management for material partnership with Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology that enabled the smooth handling of various logistical issues in the run up to, and during the conference. The Government of Kenya, through the Office of the President, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and Ministry of Agriculture also deserve special recognition for assistance extended to us at various levels during preparations for this conference. Importantly, I am most obliged to note the great role played by all participants who have made the conference a success.

As we look forward to the next GCHERA Conference in France in June 2011, I call upon the Executive Committee to devise viable means of keeping the consortium active during the intervening period, and indeed in between successive conferences in the coming years. This will make GCHERA active and continually relevant to future generations. For the participants, I need not to emphasise that there remains much to be done within our crucial agricultural sector, as we have seen in this conference. Wherever we shall be, let us in one way or another make a contribution towards the betterment of our immediate environments.

Ladies and gentlemen, while wishing you success in all agricultural endeavour back at home, I once again thank you for your role in this conference. For us at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, the 6th GCHERA Conference is a major historical event that will keep our spirits high for many generations to come.

May I now wish you God's blessings as you travel back to your homes and various work stations. Happy Christmas season and prosperity in the coming years.

Kwaheri!