

King Willem-Alexander Opens The Centennial World Seed Congress in Historic Year for Sector

His Majesty addressed the flagship seed industry event hosted by the International Seed Federation, which marked its centenary alongside hundreds of delegates

ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS, May 27, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands paid tribute to the global seed sector and its industry association, officially opening the centennial World Seed Congress in Rotterdam.

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The monarch welcomed around 1,800 industry professionals from 76 countries during the opening ceremony to mark the 100th anniversary of the International Seed Federation (ISF), which organises the annual congress.

The King took a tour of the congress, co-hosted by Dutch seed association Plantum, visiting the Plantum pavilion in recognition of the country's contribution to the global seed sector. The Netherlands is among the world's leading exporters of vegetable seeds and planting material, a sector valued at €5 billion last year.

The King also took the opportunity to meet representatives from the youth delegation, composed of young professionals and students in the seed and agriculture sector, and from national seed associations.

The 2024 ISF World Seed Congress brings together professionals from across the entire industry, from research and development to seed testing, production and distribution under this year's theme of “Navigating into the next century.”

A range of panels and sessions will look ahead to the challenges and opportunities of the global seed sector of the coming decades, while also reflecting on the successes and achievements of the past 100 years.

The three-day event also takes place during a significant year for the sustainability of global food

systems, with three UN summits on climate change, biodiversity and desertification scheduled in addition to the Summit of the Future during the UN General Assembly.

Conflict and climate change have continued to add to pressure on food systems around the world with warnings of famine and extreme hunger in areas including Gaza, Haiti and Sudan.

Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director General at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), also joined the opening ceremony. In her opening remarks, Ms Bechdol commended the efforts of the private seed sector to engage with multilateral organizations like the UN and the public sector to ensure farmers all over the world have access to high-quality seeds.

"I would go as far as to say that – seed security is food security. Seeds are central to FAO's commitment to help countries transform their agrifood systems. They enable farmers to grow food where it is needed most, re-start food production and pave the way for self-sufficiency," said Bechdol.

The seed sector is expected once again to unite at the UN's Summit of the Future in support of its landmark Seed Declaration, which was endorsed by 200 signatories ahead of the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021.

"This year is not only the centenary year for ISF but also a pivotal year for global food systems, in which seeds are the very starting point," said Michael Keller, ISF Secretary General.

"Now is the time to build bridges on the ground. The private seed sector is a solution provider, an employer, and a partner at local, national and international levels. We are uniquely positioned to support the sustainable transformation of food systems. Quality seeds provide climate resilience, higher yields and improved nutrition, all of which are critical to delivering the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for ending poverty, hunger and climate vulnerability," Keller added.

Among the plenary highlights are sessions addressing the seed trade's position in the new global order and the opportunities to accelerate seed innovation for the benefit of people and planet.

"Today, plant breeders leverage cutting-edge tools, including AI, to enhance plant characteristics, creating varieties that are even more resilient, productive, and adaptable to evolving environmental challenges," said Marco van Leeuwen, President of the International Seed Federation (ISF) and Managing Director of Dutch seed company Rijk Zwaan.

He added: "However, whatever technology comes, it will not work without the thousands of breeding and seed companies, hundreds of thousands of seedsmen and -women who are already for centuries dedicated to plant breeding, seed production, trade and marketing. Supplying farmers worldwide with the best quality seed of their choice, these companies have

contributed to feed the world and will be ready for the challenges ahead.”

The World Seed Congress is the first of several events planned to mark the ISF’s centenary. A second celebration, planned alongside the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) in July, will follow.

“We are proud to share in this special occasion with ISF to co-host the centennial World Seed Congress,” said Niels Louwaars, Managing Director of Plantum.

“The Netherlands is a natural home of the seed sector. Its globally traded innovation embedded in seeds contributes significantly to a number of Sustainable Development Goals. We are excited to build further on this into the future and drive forward a more productive and robust food system.”

Ends

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