

Special Remarks by Mr. Peter Button, Vice Secretary-General of UPOV

I would like to express my thanks to

(LAO)

Vice Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Dr. Phouangpalisak
PAVONGVIENGKHAM

Director General, Department of Agriculture, Dr. Monthathip
CHANPHENGXAY

(JAP)

Deputy Director-General, Mr. Tadaatsu IWASE
Food Industry Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

for inviting UPOV to contribute to this symposium on plant variety protection.

The theme of the symposium: *Plant Breeding and Protection of Breeders' Rights are Key to Agricultural Development* is a vitally important one – because it was the very origin of UPOV.

The fiftieth anniversary of the UPOV Convention, in 2011, provided an opportunity to reflect on the importance of plant breeding and plant variety protection. For example, it was recalled that in France, in the century from 1850 to 1950, the yield of wheat had only increased from 0.5 to 0.78 Tonnes/ha, despite the agricultural revolution. Between 1950 and 2000, the yield per hectare increased almost 5 fold - from 0.78 to 3.6 Tonnes/ha. Plant breeding, in the form of new high-yielding varieties accounted for 50% of that increase.

However, it is important to understand that the benefits that plant breeding bring to farmers and society as a whole extend much wider than just to yield increases. Plants, such as canola, have been bred to become sources of animal feed and human food and have been further improved to improve their nutritional value. Plant breeders have produced varieties of agricultural crops, vegetables, fruit and ornamentals that have enabled farmers to improve their incomes from the supply of local and global markets. And for decades, breeders have been successfully adapting crops to grow in new climates, e.g. maize in northern Europe, canola in Australia, soybean to equatorial Brazil.

The evidence of the past is clear, plant breeding is a corner-stone of food security, improving the livelihoods of farmers, meeting the needs of consumers and responding to climate change. It is equally clear that all of these challenges are increasing...and, therefore, there is a greater need than ever to support plant breeding.

But, as the theme of the symposium recognizes, for plant breeding to thrive and to meet the challenges that society faces, plant breeders need plant variety protection. Recent events hosted by UPOV have demonstrated that this message is equally valid for plant breeders in the public and private sectors, for small-, medium- and large-sized enterprises, and for individuals – including farmer-breeders. We have also seen that the UPOV system has a particular value in encouraging public-private partnerships, which enable the development and delivery of varieties that are suited to farmers' needs.

In short, we need plant breeders, so we need plant variety protection.

I am looking forward to participating in this symposium to learn about developments in plant breeding and plant variety protection in this region and to see how UPOV can play a role in supporting those developments in the future.