

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

J. Lawrence Blum
United States

to the 60th Plenary Meeting of the
**INTERNATIONAL COTTON
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, observers and guests:

On behalf of the members of the Standing Committee, I extend a sincere thanks and congratulations to the Government of the Zimbabwe and the organizers of this conference—Mr. Nguni and the Zimbabwe Organizing Committee. The title of this conference, “Cotton: An African Renaissance,” captures the rapid development of the Zimbabwe cotton industry that in six short years has transformed itself from a state-controlled sector to what it is today, a free enterprise industry looking optimistically to the future. Congratulations have been well earned by the Organizing Committee. First, for planning the program and series of events that will advance the ICAC agenda of fostering a healthy world cotton economy and then executing the program under the most severe of challenges. We all look forward to being here at Victoria Falls, to enjoying the hospitality of the people of Zimbabwe, and for a real “Out of Africa” experience.

Thanks to the executive director, Terry Townsend, and the members of the ICAC staff for the guidance, support and the assistance they have enthusiastically and ably provided in many different ways. It is the good work of Terry and the ICAC staff that allowed me to hopefully make a small contribution to the continuing development and changing agenda of the ICAC. A sincere thanks to each and every member of the Secretariat.

This morning I will focus upon reporting to you on the changing—and I repeat, changing—role of the Standing Committee, a role that has evolved significantly in the nearly four years I have had the privilege to participate in this committee. Today, the role of the Standing Committee includes that of encouraging and helping the Secretariat to serve as a catalyst for cooperative endeavors by governments and the private sector. Increasingly, your Standing Committee is functioning as a vehicle for turning member country interests and their cotton industry interests into ICAC initiatives.

However, your Standing Committee has not neglected its traditional duties, the administrative and financial oversight of the Secretariat. We continue to diligently perform these duties, and the Secretariat continues to receive high marks for its performance in these areas. In this regard, a special thanks to Mr. Liévano and Mr. Malhotra, the First and Second Vice Chairs respectively of the Standing Committee, for their good work in chairing subcommittees that expedited and focused the work of the Standing Committee.

With Standing Committee support and encouragement, the traditional ICAC functions are changing. One example of this is in the information arena. The ICAC serves as a unique source of information on the cotton economy of the world. The ICAC has aggressively taken advantage of modern information technology to provide you more timely, more diverse and more complete information—information that is immediately available to you from their home page. The ICAC staff is always anxious to know what information and in what form is most important to you—you need to communicate your informational interests to the ICAC staff. I can assure you they will be responsive. An example of the Secretariat’s information initiative is the cooperative effort with the FAO to again publish the *World Textile Fiber Consumption Survey*. Resources for this survey are coming from revenue earned under the Secretariat’s business plan initiatives. This project is an

excellent example of how the business plan is helping to increase services provided by the ICAC to the world cotton industry.

The agenda for this meeting speaks to the rapid change of the role of ICAC. One example of this is the roundtable discussion with the Private Sector Advisory Panel. This Panel, working through the Standing Committee, has helped focus ICAC attention on the need for risk management education; the development of a business plan to explore revenue opportunities, especially through the provision of information services as well as private sector involvement at plenary meetings; the form and structure of plenary meetings; the formation and report of an expert panel on biotechnology; and the distribution of information on the need for good trading practices. A special thanks to the members of the Private Sector Advisory Panel. These individuals participate at their own expense, taking time from their very busy schedules to provide their advice and encouragement to the ICAC. This afternoon, members of the Steering Committee will have the opportunity to join the Panel in a roundtable discussion on a broad range of items. This dialogue with the private sector is a new event for the plenary meeting, one that I believe deserves to become a permanent part of the agenda. Their cooperation with the ICAC has been effective, constructive and welcomed. We look forward to a long and continuing close working relationship with the Panel.

The agenda for the plenary meeting includes a session on demand enhancement, a subject in which your Standing Committee has expressed growing interest. There are many challenges facing the world's cotton industry but none is greater than the competition from synthetics—cotton's percentage of the world's fiber usage is now only about 40 percent. The Secretariat has expeditiously responded to this challenge by facilitating the creation of the Consortium for Cotton Promotion—a program focused upon national programs to increase cotton consumption.

The mission of the Consortium is to enhance demand and retail sales for cotton products in a world market threatened by increased production and consumption of chemical fibers. The Consortium will facilitate the development of national information campaigns about cotton and cotton products targeted at domestic consumers, thereby helping to build world demand for cotton in each country. The Consortium will serve as a clearinghouse for information about fiber demand, proven techniques of cotton promotion, best practices in retail level communication, cost effective measures of boosting consumer demand and market research. This initiative illustrates how cooperation and communication from member countries and the cotton industry can rapidly translate into programs to address challenges. The Consortium is an ideal example of the Secretariat's role as a catalyst for cooperative endeavors by governments and the private sector.

And lastly, this week's agenda focuses upon the improvement of cotton quality and includes a report on improving ginning methods. Your Standing Committee authorized the creation of an expert panel in response to member and private sector expressions of interest in this topic. The importance of meeting the needs of cotton's customers, the textile industry, will focus future interest in such topics as grading standards.

The Secretariat's agenda continues to diversify in response to the needs of the cotton sector, but be assured that your Standing Committee will pay needed attention to ensuring the Secretariat's resources are not overburdened. The Secretariat's initiatives are directly in response to information received from you—all of the participants in this conference. I believe that the key role of your Standing Committee is to foster these communications, to prioritize initiatives and provide the Secretariat with guidance and help. But we need your input if we are to perform our duties and to meet the high expectations that are rightly expected of the ICAC.

In closing, thanks to the delegates to the conference for their participation—especially those of you who have traveled significant distances to be here. I am confident you will find this program and events of considerable value. The members of the Standing Committee look forward to the opportunity to talk to you during the informal events. I join the executive director in urging all countries to make a commitment to including their Standing Committee delegates from Washington in their delegations to each plenary meeting. The Standing Committee is responsible for approving the agenda of each plenary meeting and overseeing the implementation of decisions taken by the Advisory Committee. Standing Committee delegates can do their jobs much more effectively if they take part in the plenary meetings. I want to thank the Standing Committee delegates who have traveled to Victoria Falls because this event provides a unique opportunity for each of us to educate ourselves as to the needs of this industry—valuable information for the work of the Standing Committee in the coming year.

On a personal note, the Standing Committee, by consensus, recommends Mr. Alfonso Liévano of Colombia for the post of Chair, Mr. Ajai Malhotra of India as the First Vice Chair, and Ms. Obi-Nnadozie as Second Vice Chair, respectively, of the Standing Committee for 2001-2002. I fully support their nominations and thank them for all the help they gave me this past year.

And lastly, it has been a privilege to chair the Standing Committee this past year—I thank you for that opportunity.