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## **The International PhD Programme in Agrobiodiversity**

I want to warmly thank the National Academy of Science, and especially Prof. Emilia Chiancone for having organized this interesting event in such a beautiful historical venue. This is an excellent opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies and the Academy around the theme of the World Food Day 2015 and, in general, around that of Agrobiodiversity.

Let me give you a few facts and figures about our International PhD Programme, which is unique in the international higher education context. Since 2004 – the year of establishment – we have issued 12 annual calls for scholarships, which have generated 866 applications, an average 72 per year. This is in itself an outstanding figure, which becomes really amazing when we look at the geographical provenance of the applicants and awardees. We have received applications from 97 countries of all continents and literally from every corner of the world. We have so far awarded 73 three-year scholarships to students from 30 different countries. This reflects the truly international dimension of our PhD Programme.

As far as I am aware, our PhD Programme is the only one in the world which covers all facets and scales of agrobiodiversity, from the genetic to the species and habitat ones. Our research themes are not limited to experimental sciences since they are progressively opening up to social sciences as well, as demonstrated by the increasing number of PhD projects incorporating a socio-economic component. We are actually moving from a multi- to an interdisciplinary approach and next we are going to take the challenge of transdisciplinary science. I do believe that this will become more and more the way to carry out research in applied disciplines like agricultural sciences.

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I am also convinced that developing communication and outreach skills will become a key asset for future scientists like our PhD students. This is why I am particularly happy to welcome the active participation of four of them in this event. They will cover the issue of family farming in two Asian countries – Indonesia and Myanmar – and two African countries – Madagascar and Ethiopia, and they will explain how their PhD work is expected to contribute to alleviate the problem of food security in their home countries. I also want to acknowledge the engagement in this event of our other PhD Programme on Agrobiosciences, here represented by Chiara Mancini, and of the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, represented by Dr Mario Marino. Concerning communication and outreach, I am also pleased to tell you that we have recently launched a scientific portal for Agrobiodiversity where we are also promoting our PhD Programme. You are welcome to visit it at: [www.agrobiodiversity.science](http://www.agrobiodiversity.science).

Let me now leave the floor to the core part of this event, after wishing a brighter and brighter future to the science and practice of Agrobiodiversity.