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Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa Appoints Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Chair of the Board

CAPE TOWN (14 June 2007)—The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa today announced the appointment of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as its first chairman.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum on Africa meeting in Cape Town, where he was due to deliver a keynote address on African agriculture, Mr Annan said he was deeply honoured to be taking up the position and hoped to use it to help drive forward progress on an issue critical to wider African development.

"I am honoured today to take up this important post and join with my fellow Africans in a new effort to comprehensively tackle the challenges holding back millions of small-scale farmers in Africa," Annan said. "Africa is the only region where overall food security and livelihoods are deteriorating. We will reverse this trend by working to create an environmentally sustainable, uniquely African Green Revolution. When our poorest farmers finally prosper, all of Africa will benefit."

The Alliance for the Green Revolution in Africa, which was established last year with an initial US\$150 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, seeks to help millions of small-scale farmers and their families across Africa to lift themselves and their families out of poverty and hunger through sustainable increases in farm productivity and incomes. It is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, and will be working throughout the continent on a wide range of interventions across the agricultural "value chain," ranging from strengthening local and regional agricultural markets, to helping improve irrigation, soil health and training for farmers, to supporting the development of new seed systems better equipped to cope with the harsh African climate.

The Alliance is a response to recent calls by African leaders to chart a new path for prosperity by spurring the continent's agricultural development and also seeks to help reverse decades of relative neglect in funding for agricultural development for Africa. It strongly endorses the vision laid out in the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which seeks a 6 percent annual growth in food production by 2015.

Dr. Monty Jones, head of FARA, a leading African agricultural research organization and a board member of AGRA, warmly welcomed the appointment. "With Kofi Annan as our new chairman the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa will be much better placed to build broader political and economic support behind our vision of pro-poor, pro-environment partnerships needed to revitalize agriculture for Africa's small-scale farmers, and replace wide-spread poverty with prosperity," he said.

A New, Sustainable, Uniquely African Green Revolution

According to Dr. Akin Adesina, vice president of Policy and Partnership at AGRA, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa is inspired by the successes of the original Green Revolution that dramatically boosted agricultural productivity in Asia and Latin America but also seeks to learn lessons from some of its weaknesses.

"The first Green Revolution more than doubled cereal production and saved the lives of hundreds of millions of people," said Dr. Adesina. "However, that experience also highlighted the critical importance of ensuring that small farmers are the primary beneficiaries of our efforts and consumer and environmental health considerations are made part and parcel of agricultural development process."

Annan's new position with the Alliance comes six months after his departure from the UN, where he served to two five-year terms as Secretary-General. During his tenure at the UN, Annan often drew attention to the link between Africa's failing agriculture systems and its persistent hunger and poverty. Keenly aware that most of Africa's poor, particularly its poor women, depend on farming for food and income, in 2004 Annan called for a "new uniquely African Green Revolution—a revolution that is long overdue, a revolution that will help the continent in its quest for dignity and peace."

"We welcome Kofi Annan as chairman of the board," said Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation. "Kofi Annan keenly understands that meeting the biggest challenges facing our world today requires broad and inclusive coalitions. His leadership in coalition building is widely admired."

In the past 15 years the number of Africans living below the poverty line (\$1/day) has increased by 50 percent and per capita food production has declined. In the past five years alone, the number of underweight children in Africa has risen by about 12 percent.

A root cause of this entrenched and deepening poverty is the fact that millions of small-scale farmers—the majority of them women working farms smaller than one hectare—cannot grow enough food to sustain their families, their communities, or their countries.

"Kofi Annan brings not only a great breadth of experience and insight into the challenges facing African agriculture, but also the will and skill to help lead a wide range of partners to address those challenges," said Bill Gates, co-chair of the Gates Foundation.

As Chairman of the Board of the Alliance, Annan plans to travel regularly throughout Africa to meet with African farmers, entrepreneurs, scientists and political leaders to discuss and promote the work of the Alliance. He will articulate the Alliance's goal to dramatically boost

farm productivity and incomes while at the same time safeguarding the environment and advancing equity.

“Kofi Annan’s vision and leadership will be a tremendous asset for the Alliance as it seeks to advance its vision of helping farmers and their families across Africa live healthier, more productive lives,” said Melinda Gates, co-chair of the Gates Foundation.

Working through Partners across the Agricultural “Value Chain”

Today, with Annan as its chair, the Alliance is led by a board of prominent African leaders, and is establishing offices in Nairobi and Accra. The Alliance is also rapidly establishing partnerships with organizations and institutions throughout Africa. It has made more than 10 initial grants, establishing partnerships with several Ministries of Agriculture, as well as prominent African plant breeders, soil health experts, and leaders of agriculture extension programs.

The Alliance is committed to building on this foundation and developing an inclusive partnership of small farmers, scientists, national governments, foundations and other donors, civil society groups, and private sector entrepreneurs. It is already working with African crop scientists and small-scale farmers to use conventional breeding techniques to develop more productive and resilient varieties of Africa’s major food crops, as well as the means to distribute them. It’s also supporting programmes that will increase the number of African agricultural scientists and programmes to monitor and evaluate its work. It will soon launch an initiative to improve the health of Africa’s soils, which are the most depleted in the world.

Over the next two years, the Alliance will develop new partnerships focused on improving water management on often parched farmlands; building more efficient agriculture markets through better information, storage and transportation; and encouraging policy reforms that support small-scale farmers and promote rural development, environmental sustainability, and trading systems that favour poor farmers.

About the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa

The African-led Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) is a dynamic partnership working across the continent to help millions of small-scale farmers and their families lift themselves out of poverty and hunger. Alliance programs develop practical solutions to dramatically boost farm productivity and incomes while safeguarding the environment and biodiversity. To achieve this goal, Alliance partnerships address all key aspects of African agriculture: from seeds, soil health and water to markets, agricultural education and policy. For further information, go to www.agra-alliance.org.

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