



J. Antonio Baltodano, President Seeds for Progress Foundation

Dear Friends, families and colleagues,

First, I want to thank each of you for your support for Seeds for Progress, and for being here, in Amsterdam, tonight. Your presence is what gives meaning to this gathering.

I must say that I was extremely moved by the wise words of Sir Harvey McGrath and Professor Doctor Louis Fresco, regarding education. It's a privilege to listen to them speak so passionately about a subject that goes to the heart of what Seeds for Progress is doing in Nicaragua and Guatemala. Thank you both for your participation and generosity.

As president and founder of Seeds for Progress, I have witnessed firsthand how our program has enriched and improved the quality of life of thousands of children and their communities.

Nicaragua is a country blessed with a population that, despite its economic limitations and the ups and downs of its political history, has a remarkable zest for life. Dismay and hopelessness are not a trait of the Nicaraguan character. Instead people are resilient and tenacious. I am blessed to live and work in a land where hope and faith in the future move people forward.

My family and I share this hope and this faith. Contributing to the development of our coffee communities in Nicaragua and also in Guatemala is our way of standing by our convictions and honoring the efforts and desires of so many to improve their lot in life.



As you know my family has been in the coffee business for almost a century. My Grandfather graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1893 as a Medical doctor. After his graduation he went back to his birthplace, a small town called Diriamba in Nicaragua. In his memoirs, he wrote: "I found out I had a problem: Among my patients there were maybe five or six who could pay my fees, but they also happened to be my friends. I played chess and poker with them. Because we were close, I took care of them for free. Then I had many patients who were so poor I didn't have the heart to charge them for my services. When I realized this situation, I decided to become a coffee farmer" After several years of dedicating himself to this, he thought he could get a better price for his coffee if he convinced other farmers to give him theirs in consignment. They did, and so my grandfather embarked on a ship to London and sold all the coffee he had gathered. Three months later, he returned to his wife and family and paid all the farmers who had trusted him to sell the coffee at the best price possible. This is how our coffee farming and exporting began.

Then my father founded CISA, which is now the oldest company in the group, over sixty-five years old. I followed on his footsteps and started my career in the coffee business in 1975 and founded Mercon in New York in 1982.

Through all these years it has been a challenge to survive in this volatile business as an exporter and importer across the world, but we have done it. And at this point I feel better than ever because together with Mercon and Seeds for Progress, we are not only doing business, but we are committed and fully engaged in the mission of developing



a better coffee world through education. We believe that education has a multiplier effect, because by improving the quality of life of many coffee growers and their communities, we build a solid foundation for sustained economic growth.

The digital age with its technological advances has provided excellent tools that have changed for the better the way children learn. For these tools to be effective we have worked in training and empowering teachers on their use. Now they can take full advantage of the technologies we have provided and motivate students to become the best they can be.

With the support of the graduate school of education at the University of Pennsylvania, our Digital Seeds program has been a success. I want to thank Dr. Sharon Ravitch, professor and board member of Seeds for Progress for her invaluable contributions over the years and for being here tonight.

We are also proud to have promoted the use of these technological advances in education at a national level in schools across Nicaragua and Guatemala, adding value and efficiency to their school systems.

In the last couple of years, we have also been working, in the coffee communities, to develop a program that integrates the context of coffee in the school's curriculum. We think that connecting students to the heart of their families farming activities will be an incentive for a new generation of coffee farmers and a clear way to show them the practical value of obtaining a good education.



And tonight, we are delighted and thrilled to announce that thanks to our partner the Entrepreneurial Development Bank FMO, the coffee school program will be implemented! The bank has committed a 265K dollar funding that will allow us to fulfill this wish, and we will sign this agreement right here, right now! Let me invite Mrs. Pieterneel Boogaard from the FMO to come to the stage and sign this agreement.

This is a historic moment for the future of our rural coffee generations. It will increase the productivity of farmers and allow rural areas to flourish creating opportunities that will reduce migration to the cities and foster the sustainability of coffee! Please let's give a big round of applause to our partner and friend for this great contribution to the future generation of coffee producers and to a better coffee world.

Let's continue cultivating lives through education. Let's be generous, I want to stress that 100 % of your donations go to support the programs of the foundation since all the administrative costs are paid by Mercon and other companies in our family.

Thank you again, please enjoy dinner and don't forget to participate in our silent auction.

Let's do good, let's create together a better coffee world.

Thank you very much!