



**UNIDO Industrial Development Board, 44th session,
Vienna, 22-24 November 2016
Statement by Mauro Giacca, Director-General ICGEB**

Mr. Chair
Mr. Director General
Distinguished delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are convened this week in Vienna to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Foundation of UNIDO and I am most grateful for the opportunity to address this Board on this occasion. In fact, the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, which I have the honor to direct, started almost 30 years ago as a UNIDO project and developed into an international intergovernmental organization of its own, precisely in accordance with the original vision of the founding fathers. But let me add proudly that ICGEB is possibly the most relevant success story of UNIDO itself. Today, we have 64 Members among countries all around the world and a total of 85 signatories to the Statutes. We operate three world-class laboratories from the Headquarters in Trieste, Italy: in Trieste itself, in New Delhi, India and in Cape Town, South Africa, with over 500 scientists working on a permanent basis and with an impressive number of visitors or participants in a large number of activities every year.

All of this has been possible thanks to the vision of a late Deputy Director General of UNIDO, Mr. Gaurie, and his Deputy who managed the project after him, Mr. Venkataraman. Thanks to their leadership the Indian Government has always supported ICGEB together with the constant and very generous funding of the Government of Italy, which is able to match by one order of magnitude each year the contribution of the Member States, which I would like to emphasize here are far from negligible.

The birth of the ICGEB in the early '80s was based on a visionary idea: that biotechnology and its products might contribute in an essential manner to global development. That was the time when the first recombinant gene products first reached the market (insulin in 1982, followed by growth hormone in 1985, the hepatitis B vaccine and interferon in 1986, erythropoietin in 1989). These landmark dates marked important improvements for medicine and also huge economic success for the North American companies that were producing these drugs. Monoclonal antibodies followed immediately afterwards. Who was to develop biotechnology for the developing countries? Or even more important: who was to train scientists in these areas, in order to allow global and leveled development of biotechnology throughout the world? It was based on these pillars that the ICGEB was founded 30 years ago and has continued to operate throughout these years. The areas of applications have been broad, ranging from human health (protein drugs and vaccines), plant genetics and food production, energy and other

industrial applications. Most importantly, continuous attention has been focused on the development of capacity building of young scientists from the ICGEB Member States.

The ICGEB has accordingly devoted all its activities with enthusiasm, particularly those of all the scientists who have contributed to these great results, and here I would like to mention the late Director-General, Arturo Falaschi, who led the institution for 15 years, bringing it to become an independent international organization and affirming its activities in the international arena. Today we can proudly say that the ICGEB represents, for the scientific communities in our Member States and particularly for the countries whose economies are under radical transformation or are still somehow delayed in their overall development, an independent and authoritative scientific hub. One that serves to support efforts to strengthen research activities and spread scientific knowledge with a special focus on technology transfer to industry and innovation.

I would emphasize further the large complementarity that exists between the priorities of UNIDO in promoting industrial development and the international research and training capacity that the ICGEB possesses in the fields of molecular genetics and biotechnology. I would candidly admit that, during the last several years, we have not been able to leverage this complementarity. We are now in a position and with a will, however, to reverse this situation. I am very glad to note that, since the ICGEB Board in Cape Town, in May this year, we have started to pursue joint studies with UNIDO to put together our respective assets to fulfill the expectations and requirements of our constituencies, which, in the case of the ICGEB, fully coincides with those of UNIDO. For example, this is the case of the BRICS countries, with which UNIDO has started a series of very intense cooperative activities in which the ICGEB can play an important role in the biotechnology sector thanks to its laboratories in India and South Africa as well as its flagship partnership with Brazil, China and Russia.

Specific areas for the generation of joint initiatives between the ICGEB and UNIDO are in the field of plant biotechnology, to increase yield, nutritious properties and resistance to stress of food crops, or their energy content in the case of biofuels; in the field of biomedicine, with the local production of biosimilars and pharmaceuticals in developing countries, along with the development of innovative vaccines for infectious diseases; and in the field of enzymes and bio-catalysts for pollution management and cleaner production, as well as industrial applications in general. In this framework we have already had a few substantive meetings and we are now in the process of defining a roadmap in order to identify specific projects. We are strongly convinced that the partnership between UNIDO and the ICGEB not only lead to a synergistic rather than additive outcome, but is also endowed with an intrinsic potential to attract cooperation from major donors. We think of the World Bank and its related system of the regional development banks, as well as the European Commission, without forgetting possible attention and support by private foundations, by individual Governments, public foundations and other major donors.

It is in this very spirit that I speak at this Board meeting today on behalf of the entire ICGEB constituency, to wish UNIDO all success in its future endeavors.