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High-profile symposium looks at genomics' role in food security

Abu Dhabi, March 4, 2018 – Under the patronage of H.E. Mariam bint Mohammed Almheiri, Minister of State for Future Food Security, and H.E. Sarah bint Youssef Al Amiri, Minister of State for Advanced Sciences, and in collaboration with the Emirates Scientists Council, the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) organized a symposium titled "Genomics: Applications of Advanced Sciences for Food Security & Health" at the Khalifa University of Science and Technology.

The event was attended by H.E. Mariam bint Mohammed Almheiri, Minister of State for Future Food Security, and H.E. Sarah bint Youssef Al Amiri, Minister of State for Advanced Sciences, along with a host of experts, researchers and specialists in applied genomics and advanced sciences, including Dr. Wang Jian, President of BGI, the world's largest genomics institute.

The symposium tackled the subject of genomics, from basic science to applications, identifying methods to modify and improve genetics in many scientific research disciplines, most notably agriculture and health. Experts discussed ways to use scientific research outputs to genetically modify plants, achieve food-resource sustainability, and overcoming harsh climate conditions. Participants also looked into possible uses of genomics in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of diseases.

H.E. Almheiri commented: "This symposium is part of the UAE's efforts to embrace sciences and scientific discoveries to better serve the UAE community; it comes within the framework of the UAE Government's mission to provide an integrated scientific system capable of enhancing the performance of vital sectors in the country. Furthermore, the UAE is working to normalise the use of scientific research and innovation in the development of sustainable solutions for issues that shape the future of our country, including future food security and health sciences."

"Genomics is one of the main pillars that contribute to improving and developing future food security in the UAE, and to achieving food sustainability without compromising environmental security," H.E. Almheiri noted. "This is made possible through unlocking agricultural potential, improving the efficiency of agricultural inputs, and providing the workforce with the necessary tools to produce nutritious and sustainable food that will enhance the country's competitiveness and help shape a food-secure UAE for generations to come."

Meanwhile, H.E. Sarah Al Amiri said: "Advanced sciences are a cornerstone of the UAE's plans and strategies for the future, which prioritize the lifestyle and wellbeing of community members in the lead-up to the UAE Centennial 2071 Plan. The UAE Government is working to develop mechanisms to increase the UAE's contribution to science and technology, and benefit from scientific advancements to improve quality of life."

"The importance of this symposium stems from its focus on how genomics research can be practically implemented across key areas, which benefits the health of the community as a whole, as well as the health of individuals. These discussions explore the applications that created a breakthrough in the field of genomics and healthcare. Furthermore, the conference complements the preventive measures carried

out by healthcare institutions to provide the best possible services for the entire community," H.E. Al Amiri concluded.

The symposium included the signing of an agreement of intent between ICBA and BGI, which seeks to develop the necessary frameworks and plans for the establishment of a joint research center at ICBA's Dubai headquarters.

The agreement stipulates the establishment of the center, and outlines a clear research and operations strategy for the upcoming six months. The center is set to unify efforts of researchers, academics and decision-makers in developing strategies that accelerate adaptation to climate change in the desert environment, enhance biodiversity and contribute to sustainable development.

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