

Better Cotton Initiative. Statement by Lise Melvin @ ICAC / Interlaken

Ladies and gentleman, good afternoon. My name is Lise Melvin and I am the Executive Director of the Better Cotton Initiative – more widely known as BCI.

Thank you to the ICAC, the organizing committee and the government of Switzerland for preparing the Seventy First Plenary Meeting of the ICAC.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you all today. I will talk about cotton, sustainability, and Better Cotton.

I believe it is true to say that every day, everyone on the planet touches cotton – it is a part of all our lives.

This important natural and biodegradable fibre has no cultural or geographic boundaries – it is ubiquitous. The meaning of sustainability is unfortunately not the same.

There is a huge variety of perspectives within this room and even more outside this room, about how good or bad cotton is from the perspective of sustainability. And those same people also hold very different perspectives on what sustainability means.

I am not saying anything you don't know already - we are all human beings and rarely perceive things the same way as each other – but that doesn't really help us with the topic of this Plenary Meeting.

The criticisms that cotton experiences, about environmental, labour and trading practices as well as others, can sometimes be justified and other times cannot be justified. The thing is - whether it is justified or not should not be our primary preoccupation. We would do better to focus on **how** we respond and **how** we take action.

People across the world care about cotton and care about sustainability. It matters to me, it matters to you, it matters to your children, and it matters to everyone else because:

- There are around 300 million people in the world dependent on cotton

- And we all know that cotton is an important – even critical – economic driver for many countries

The thing is - **it matters to each person for different reasons**. Each reason for caring is as valid as another, and the key is to channel the energy this caring generates for positive outcomes.

BCI therefore welcomes and appreciates the efforts of SEEP and Cotton Incorporated to gather good metrics and carry out analyses that provide evidence to support positive cotton messages.

BCI exists to transform cotton production worldwide by developing **Better Cotton** as a sustainable mainstream commodity.

Better Cotton is defined as cotton produced by farmers who:

1. minimise the harmful impact of crop protection practices
2. use water efficiently and care for the availability of water
3. care for the health of the soil
4. conserve natural habitats
5. care for and preserve the quality of the fibre
6. promote Decent Work

Better Cotton provides a definition of sustainability for cotton production:

- because Better Cotton is consistent with the UN definition of sustainability - as in - if the production system used today does not diminish the ability of future generations to produce cotton.
- because Better Cotton is clear about the requirements, while not prescriptive about how to meet those requirements - it is respectful of, and adaptable to, local realities
- because Better Cotton defines a *process* that embeds **continuous improvement** and **sharing best practice**
- because Better Cotton has broad support across the supply chain and represents a balanced and diverse group of stakeholders
- because Better Cotton is the *only* standard that has a clear strategy for mainstreaming and partnering with complementary existing programs
- because Better Cotton collects a range of data indicating improved and measurable performance

BCI is a Swiss membership association that operates:

- Globally
- On an inclusive basis
- Was established with the ongoing support and advice from SECO, Swedish Sida, IDH – the sustainable trade initiative, Rabobank Foundation, ICCO, and the Swedish Postcode Foundation
- As well as our 250 members from:
Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, India, Indonesia, Luxembourg, Mali, Mozambique, Netherlands, Pakistan, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, United Kingdom, and USA.
- Our current partners:
ABRAPA, Cotton Made in Africa, WWF, Solidaridad, Olam, APROCA, Ambuja Cement Foundation, Arvind, AFPRO, Cotton Connect, and the Trident Group
currently working with farmers in:
Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, China, Côte d'Ivoire, India, Malawi, Mali
Mozambique, Pakistan, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

- And our Advisory Committee members:

Pins BROWN, Simon FERRIGNO, Clara GUASCH, Andrew MACDONALD, Francesca MANCINI, Colin POULTON, Richard POLLARD, and Terry TOWNSEND

All of whom I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you.

Thank you for your energy and commitment to cotton and to sustainability.

Better Cotton can be cotton's best friend. It is global, inclusive, defined, has sustainable and transformative intentions, and wants to work in partnership with you.

I thank you for listening and look forward to our continued dialogue here in Interlaken.