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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

Original: English

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION

### COMMUNICATION FROM BELIZE

The following proposal, received on 20 March 2024, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Belize.

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1. Belize is grateful for the technical assistance received from the International Regional Organization for Agricultural Health (OIRSA) and the "Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund" (ICDF) for assisting Belize in its efforts to exclude *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *cubense* Tropical Race 4 (TR4) from Belize and the region while at the same time prepare in case of an eventual detection.

2. *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *cubense* Tropical Race 4 (TR4) is a soilborne fungus that represents one of the biggest threats to global banana production, affecting not only local and international markets but also food security for millions of people in banana-growing areas.

3. TR4 has the potential to contaminate soils for decades. Planting material, water, soil particles, tools, footwear and machinery can efficiently disseminate the fungus.

4. TR4 is aggressive to Cavendish banana which is the cultivar grown as a commercial crop worldwide. It can attack other cultivars such as plantains, cooking bananas and a diverse range of dessert bananas which are major sources of food in tropical countries.

5. TR4 was first reported in Chinese Taipei in 1989, but is believed to have originated in South East Asia. In 2013, it was reported in the Middle East, which was the first official report of TR4 outside of South East Asia. The disease continues to spread and has been reported in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. In 2019, TR4 was reported for the first time in Latin America (in Colombia). It is already present Peru and Venezuela.

6. In Belize, bananas are the second largest export, after sugar and one of the oldest industries in the country. It makes up 1.8% of Belize's GDP. Banana represents 17% of Belize's total exports. The value of banana exports in 2022 was BZE \$82 million. About 3900 persons are employed in the banana industry in Belize.

7. Considering the importance of the industry to Belize, the Plant Health Department of the Belize Agricultural Health Authority has been taking measures (surveillance, public awareness, increase diagnostic capacity etc.) in collaboration with the Belize banana industry and working in tandem with other countries of the region to exclude TR4 from Belize and the region while at the same time preparing in case of an eventual detection.

8. In an effort to strengthen our preparedness in his regard, four officers of the Belize Agricultural Health Authority took part in training programs "Integrated Pest Management and Diagnosis of Tropical Race 4 Fusarium in Banana Cultivation" under the "Regional Project for the Prevention and Control of Fusarium TR4 of banana and plantain in Central America", co-implemented by "Taiwan ICDF", OIRSA, and the Government of Belize.

9. Two of the officers took part in the training "Strengthening the Capacity for TR4 Diagnosis" held from 10-16 September 2023 in Chinese Taipei and the other two participated in "Integrated Management of TR4" that took place at various locations in Chinese Taipei from 17-23 September 2023.

10. Belize would like to thank OIRSA and the "Taiwan ICDF" in assisting our efforts to prepare for our response to a TR4 outbreak if any should occur.

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