



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Eighth Session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on PGRFA

Opening remarks

Maria Helena Semedo,
Deputy Director-General, Climate and Natural Resources

11 November 2019
Plenary Hall, 10:00

*Chairperson, Ms Christine Dawson
Honourable Minister Singh Tomar,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. Welcome to the **Eighth Session of the Governing Body of the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources**, which celebrates its **15th Anniversary**.
2. This anniversary honors the long **history of domestication, use and exchange of the plant biodiversity** that feeds our world.
3. **Crop genetic diversity** is a treasure of human civilization and we must make sure it remains a **legacy for generations** to come, as it is a **public good** that **benefits the global community**.
4. Without a wide range of crops and their genetic resources, we cannot have **quality nutrition for healthy and productive lives, adapt our crops to climate change or achieve global sustainable development goals**.
5. The crux of the **Treaty - food security and biodiversity protection** – are at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals and 2030 Agenda.
6. The Treaty:
 - establishes a **global system** to provide farmers, plant breeders and scientists with **access to plant genetic materials**;
 - ensures that **benefits** derived from the use of these genetic materials are **shared** widely, especially with originating countries; and
 - recognizes the enormous **contribution of farmers** to the diversity of crops that feed the world.

7. In February, FAO launched *The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture*, which highlights that **biodiversity for food and agriculture is declining** day by day.
8. We are losing both **wild** and **domesticated species**.
9. Against that alarming picture, we know that **biodiversity** is vital to **improve agricultural and food production**.
10. Yet, the **less we use, the more we lose**.
11. Over the course of history, **humans utilized over 3000 plant species**.
12. Today we mostly **depend on only 150 types**, with just **three crops** – rice, wheat and maize – providing over **half our calories**.
13. To address the world's complex challenges, **we must change this situation**.
14. And we can do so by **strengthening the role of the Treaty**.

Excellencies,

15. Thanks to our collective actions during the last decade under your leadership, we have made great **strides to safeguard much of the planet's crop genetic diversity**.
16. Through its **Multilateral System**, the Treaty ensures access to important **public gene banks** around the globe – with **over 5.4 million accessions** to this gene pool since 2007.
17. And its **Benefit-sharing Fund** has supported **over 1 million people** in developing countries through agricultural projects.
18. But there is more to do!
19. Looking ahead, I would like to suggest actions we can take together to **accelerate and build on these successes**. As the flyer reminds us: **Everything starts with a seed**.
20. **First, EXPAND**: we should optimize the crop genetic diversity that is still conserved in farmers' fields and in gene banks to improve both farmers' livelihoods and diversify our diets.
21. **Second, DIVERSIFY**: we must move beyond staple food crops and increase investments in the conservation, availability and use of plant genetic resources of nutritious crops such as fruits, vegetables and underutilized crops.
22. **Third, BUILD CAPACITY**: we must improve access to scientific information and facilitate the transfer of technologies and expertise, particularly in developing countries.

23. **Fourth, WORK TOGETHER**: the Treaty brings together farmers, scientists, governments, civil society and the private sector, mixing traditional knowledge with advancing technology, to develop the full potential of plant genetic diversity, so that benefits can be shared by everyone.
24. **Fifth, STRENGTHEN POLICIES**: countries must reinforce agriculture and development policies relevant to biodiversity. They should integrate the practical dimensions of conservation and sustainable use promoted by the International Treaty, including the implementation of Farmers' Rights, at the national level.
25. **Sixth, ADVOCATE**: we need to leverage the work of the Treaty and FAO's Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in the international policy arena related to biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development.

Excellencies,

26. I would like to welcome the most recent members, **Georgia and Mongolia**, bringing the total number of **Contracting Parties to 146**.
27. FAO is committed to increasing that number so that the Treaty becomes a **universal agreement** in the near future.
28. In the next biennium, FAO will strengthen its work with Members to **mainstream biodiversity into food and agriculture policies** - this will also strengthen the Treaty.
29. FAO will encourage Members to highlight the importance of **food and agriculture** in the **Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework**, to be adopted at the 15th Convention on Biological Diversity to take place in China next year.
30. As we celebrate the Treaty's 15th Anniversary, let us **be ambitious** in addressing our global challenges and in setting new goals and perspectives.
31. I am fully confident that in the **spirit of collaboration and trust** that always resonates in meetings of the International Treaty, you, the Contracting Parties, can reinvigorate and strengthen the Treaty.
32. I can assure you that you can **count on FAO** to continue supporting implementation of the International Treaty.
33. I wish you very successful deliberations.
34. Thank you.