



**INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL CONFERENCE ON ANIMAL
GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
3-7 September 2007, Interlaken, Switzerland**

**Closing address by José Maria Sumpsi-Viñas
Assistant Director-General
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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

To me falls the pleasure and the honour of congratulating you on behalf of the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Mr Jacques Diouf, for the historic results you have achieved this week.

You have just adopted the *Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources*. This is a milestone in international efforts to promote the wise management of the world's animal genetic resources for food and agriculture. It will provide the framework for action and international cooperation for many years to come. It is a visible sign of the urgency that all countries and regions give to ensuring the survival of these crucial resources, and to improving their use to achieve global food security and sustainable development.

Today's animal genetic resources were developed by 10,000 or more years of animal husbandry, through the skills and patience of generation after generation of livestock keepers and farmers, throughout the world. Domestic animals accompanied our ancestors into a wide range of climates, from the kindest to the harshest, from hot to cool, from rainy to desert. They have proved themselves immensely adaptable. Human survival in some of the harshest environments is only possible because of our animals. We will now need to once again call on the adaptability and production potential that animal genetic resources represent to supply the growing needs of our burgeoning populations, in the face of the enormous challenge of climatic dislocation and global warming. We cannot afford to let them be lost through inaction, difficult as this task may be. That would be disrespect towards our forbearers, and irresponsibility towards our children. The *Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources* is the first concrete international instrument to address this challenge in a systematic way. It recognizes the interdependence of all peoples upon these valuable resources in a world that changes faster than ever before, and the joint responsibilities of rich and poor, north and south, and developed and developing countries.

But we cannot stop here. Adopting a *Global Plan of Action* is not an end in itself. It now needs to be implemented. Governments must now demonstrate the sustained political will to do so, and resources will have to be found, nationally and internationally. Success will depend on farsighted cooperation among many stakeholders. Governments, international organisations, the scientific community, donors, civil society organisations and the private sector all have important roles to play.

There are both moral and practical imperatives to reinforce support to livestock keepers and breeders, particularly in developing countries, who are the custodians of much of the world's animal genetic resources, and who depend directly on them for their livelihoods. Their roles and needs cannot be ignored, if the *Global Plan of Action* is to succeed.

In the *Interlaken Declaration*, which you adopted today, you have affirmed your commitment to stewardship of the world's heritage of animal genetic resources, and to implementing to the best of your capabilities the *Global Plan of Action*. On behalf of FAO, I should like to express our full commitment to assisting you in this task. We must move simultaneously on many fronts. Technical capacities, particularly in developing

countries, will have to be re-enforced; national programmes and policies for sustainable use and development, conservation and characterization will have to be established or strengthened; and an effective international policy framework for animal genetic resources – a crucial part of the world's biodiversity for food and agriculture – must be incrementally built up in a way that reflects the specific characteristics of animal genetic resources and livestock production, and the real needs of animal breeders and livestock keepers everywhere.

FAO's Agriculture Department will work closely with your governments in this. Our Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture will direct this work and monitor its success, as a major component of its Multi-year Programme of Work, which covers all components of biological diversity of interest to food and agriculture. Your success here joins recent international successes in establishing a framework for plant genetic resources, and the implementation of the *Global Plan of Action* can profit from and contribute to work in the other sectors of biodiversity for food and agriculture, and to cross-sectorial integration.

In closing, I wish to convey my gratitude and deepest appreciation to the Government of Switzerland and particularly the Federal Office for Agriculture for hosting this Conference and collaborating closely with FAO to make it possible. I would also like to thank the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Governments of Australia, Germany, Ireland, Norway and Spain for their financial support.

Your work here this week has been an important contribution to developing an international consensus on ecologically sound approaches to managing biodiversity for food and agriculture, at a time of accelerating socio-economic and climatic stresses. I congratulate you on the success of the Conference and I wish you all a safe trip home.

Thank you.