

Rome, Italy, 24 April 2012

FAO Director-General speaks at the inauguration of the Sheikh Zayed International Media and Knowledge Center

Your Highness **Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates,

Your Excellency **Rashid Ahmed bin Fahad**, Minister of Environment and Water of the United Arab Emirates

Your Excellency Ambassador **Abdulaziz Bin Nasser Al Shamsi**,

Mr **Carlos Sere**, Chief Development Strategist, IFAD

Mr **Amir Abdulla**, and Mr Ramiro Lopez da Silva, Deputy Executive Directors of WFP,

Dr. **Kwesi Atta-Krah**, Deputy Director General, Bioversity,

Ambassador **Pietro Sebastiani**, Permanent Representative of Italy to FAO,

Mr **Mario Sammartino**, Deputy Director General for Italian Cooperation,

Chairs and Co-chairs of FAO Regional Groups

Goodwill Ambassadors of FAO,

Honourable Guests,

Colleagues,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am deeply honored to welcome you to the inauguration of the Sheikh Zayed International Media and Knowledge Center.
2. In the name of FAO, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude and warmest thanks to the United Arab Emirates, whose generous financial support allowed FAO to build this facility.
3. The Sheikh Zayed Center was approved, designed and built in a record period, thanks to the hard work and dedicated efforts of scores of people both in and outside FAO. To all of them, and especially to Mister Jacques Diouf, who put all his energies behind this project, go my sincerest thanks.
4. It was under Diouf's leadership that this Center was envisioned, discussed, designed and built. Although invited, Mister Diouf was not able to join us in this ceremony because of his recent appointment as Personal Adviser to the President of Senegal.
5. Ladies and gentlemen, FAO is above all a knowledge Organization. Our storehouse is the most valuable resource we have to offer.
6. The Sheikh Zayed Center represents a major step forward in our capacity to communicate, network and share knowledge. It allows us to link persons, ideas and lessons from around the world.

7. It provides the tools for live TV broadcasting, making more and more up-to-the-minute information available to a global audience.
8. The Sheikh Zayed Center is situated in the main hall of FAO, but is open to all those who share our vision and goals. It is a facility that will be best used if it is at the service of countries and their needs. I invite our Members, the Rome-based Agencies and other partners to explore together the possibilities that this complex offers.
9. It is an exceptional work of art, inspired by the date palm, the “tree of life”, so important to the culture of the Arabic World particularly the United Arab Emirates.
10. The Center stands as a permanent tribute to the memory of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founder of the United Arab Emirates, the visionary man of the desert who once said, “Give me agriculture and I will give you civilization”.
11. Sheikh Zayed helped turn green large tracts of the desert by investing in agriculture, and in particular in date palm production. The United Arab Emirates are today the world’s seventh date producer, accounting for six percent of world production. This is an achievement that FAO is proud to have contributed to.
12. I want to recall that the ties between FAO and the United Arab Emirates have been increasing since the nomination, in 2010, of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak al Ketbi, Mother of the Emirates Nation, as Extraordinary Ambassador of FAO.
13. I am sure that this Center will mark a new era of cooperation between FAO and the United Arab Emirates.
14. Once again, I wish to thank the United Arab Emirates for making all this possible and for providing FAO with such a valuable and powerful tool in the accomplishment of its mission. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Italian Government and the City of Rome for their support in developing this project. And thanks to everyone who has come here today to share this very special moment with us.
