

VOTE OF THANKS

Delivered by Hon. Robert K.K. Sichinga

Minister of Agriculture and Livestock of Zambia

at the conclusion of the

28th AFRICAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE OFR THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO) OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN TUNIS

The Director-General FAO,

The Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council,

The FAO Assistant Director-General for the Africa Region,

The Chairperson for the 28th FAO Regional Conference for Africa,

Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries from Africa,

Ambassadors and Heads of Government Delegations,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As we come to the conclusion of this FAO Regional Conference for Africa, is it not fitting, dear fellow Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Ambassadors, Senior Government officials and observers alike, that we express our profound gratitude and compliments to our hosts, the Tunisian Government.

The Minister of Agriculture of Tunisia, His Excellency, Hon. Lassaad Lanchaal, please convey to your entire Government leadership and brotherly and sisterly Tunisian people, our deep appreciation for your most generous and wonderful hospitality, in this truly lovely city of Tunis.

Our brother the Minister came as far as the airport to receive most, if not, all the forty plus ministers. Thank you our dear brother.

As though that was not enough, yesterday 27th March at the commencement of the inaugural Ceremony of the Ministerial Meeting, we were privileged to have that meeting officially opened by the Chief of Government, the Prime Minister His Excellency Mr. Mehdi Jomma. Many of us, from the rest of the African continent are well-aware of the challenges and reforms the Government is undertaking within Tunisia. We, your brothers and sisters, would like to wish you well and success in your endeavour.

Allow me colleagues and friends to turn our compliments to our friend, the dynamic leader and Director-General of FAO – His Excellency Jose Graziano da Silva.

I believe, I represent the sentiments of all of us, when I say that the UN and especially Africa, is most fortunate, to have this son of Brazil, for bringing such unique and pro-active leadership to FAO. Since his assuming office, we have all been witnesses to his unwavering commitment to ensuring that Agriculture fulfils our aspirations on the African continent. Has he not been our lead advocate in ensuring that agriculture is central to our individual national economic agenda? Has he not been with us on the programme for eradicating hunger and poverty by 2025?

Excellency Graziano da Silva, during my brief tenure as Minister of Agriculture and Livestock for my own country, I have come to really appreciate your tremendous enthusiasm and relenting effort for agricultural development. The Lula Institute, has also been brought on board to support the aspirations of African Union for ending hunger on the African continent, thanks to you. If I were to be there in 2015, I would have proposed for the renewal of your tenure, so that we may consolidate on the initiatives that you have commenced.

As I exit my country's Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, let me say to you brother Graziano da Silva that, You have personally aroused in me, such a great inspiration to drive Agriculture in my country, to develop a "transformation programme for Zambian Agriculture". I am expecting a bumper harvest for the 2014 year, even as I move back to the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, my eyes will be on the increased agricultural output.

As I move back to Commerce, I ask, what else can we process for value addition, if not on agricultural commodities/produce? I therefore, look forward to working with my successor as well as with FAO leadership in Rome, to ensure that we have adequate food for local consumption and exports to the regions around us and beyond.

Let me conclude this brief intervention by congratulating each and every one of you Excellencies, who came to this Regional Conference. This time come; and now is that time, for Africa to take responsibility for its own future; and to deal with its own challenges including creating jobs for our youths.

Almost fifty (50) years has passed since the attainment of the independence of most of our countries. The solutions to our continental challenges, do not lie elsewhere but within ourselves. Whether we are talking about the allocation of 10% of our national budget under CAADP per Maputo Declaration, or it is the various versions of CAADP in our respective countries or the elimination of hunger!!

All these remain out basic responsibility. For it is said that 'those who offer selfless service to the nation, are the builders of the nation and pride of their race and breed'.

Shakespeare once said, 'my dear brothers, the fault lies not in our stars but in ourselves' That is equally true for Africa today.

I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to move this Vote of Thanks. May God Almighty bless each one of us, each of our nations and may God Almighty bless Africa. I Thank You.