

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
YAB DATO' SERI DR. AHMAD ZAHID HAMIDI
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA**

**AT THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANISATION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS 33RD REGIONAL CONFERENCE
FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (FAO APRC)**

**PERDANA HALL 2,
PUTRAJAYA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE
PUTRAJAYA
10 MARCH 2016 / 9.00 AM**

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

SALUTATIONS

*Honourable Dato' Sri Ahmad Shabery Cheek,
Minister of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Malaysia.*

*His Excellency Dr José Graziano da Silva,
Director-General,
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).*

Honourable Ministers of Asia and the Pacific Member Countries,

Members of the Diplomatic Corp,

Mr Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and a very good morning.

1. Let me begin by expressing my sincere thanks to the Organizing Committee for inviting me, to officiate the 33rd FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific or FOA-APRC. I would also like to join Honourable Dato' Sri Ahmad Shabery Cheek in welcoming delegates from 46 countries of the Asia-Pacific; "Selamat Datang" and Welcome to Malaysia. Your presence here in Putrajaya symbolises your commitment to the success of this Conference.

2. Allow me to touch briefly on the current scenario of the global food and agriculture. Food is a basic necessity of life, while agriculture is its main source. These two sectors are very crucial and need to be harmonised. This is especially true when the world population is projected to increase from 7.4 billion currently, to more than 9 billion in 2050. The increase in population, coupled with changes in Lifestyles, diet and eating patterns will lead to increase in demand for safe and nutritious food.

3. The global challenges therefore, are to feed the growing population and at the same time, to sustain nation's food security. It has a direct impact on millions of undernourished people who never get enough food to eat, and fulfil their basic diet requirements. Like it or not, the majority of this group, estimated at 500 million out of 800 million live in our region.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. I am happy to note that the subject of food security is the main agenda of this conference. Undoubtedly, food security is of high importance to a country or any country for that matter, but please bear in mind that the pre-requisite to sustain food security is national security, a subject that is close, very close to my heart.

5. It does not need someone with a brain of a scientist to tell us that production of food WILL NOT BE FEASIBLE if a country is war-stricken. We have seen too many cases where when a country collapses, food is unavailable simply because, the national security is compromised. As Minister of Home Affairs, I am committed to ensuring that national as well as regional security and stability are strengthened and maintained. Only then, our food security agenda can become a reality. Now back to our main agenda here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. Apart from susceptible to extreme climate events, food production has also encountered new challenge where, food is now also a source for renewable energy. This situation puts agriculture sector as a very prominent industry contributing to not only basic energy requirement for the people, but also potential energy resource to be tapped into. In this regard, I wish to draw again your attention and highlight the fact that, one-third of all food produced worldwide are wasted yearly. Therefore, I call upon all the member states to support the initiative by FAO to reduce food wastage, and help to minimize the carbon footprint due to excessive food production.

7. The inter-linkage of food and agriculture sector and the pertinent issues, makes FAO relevant and continue to be significant after 70 years of its existence. FAO has become a centre of reference and avenue of actions to deal with these cross-cutting issues. In this regard, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate Dr José Graziano da Silva, and the FAO team for their commendable and tireless efforts to reduce poverty and ensuring food security.

8. However, there are still a lot more to be done. I was made to understand that, it is estimated that 85 percent of 500 million small farmers are in our region. The irony is that, these unsung heroes are the ones putting food on our table. Unfortunately, these small farmers are still unable to build sufficient resilience in their livelihoods, and are facing various hurdles to make their ends, meet.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. Malaysia is one of the 72 countries worldwide that has achieved the MDG-1 target to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. In 2014, we are among the 13 countries received recognition from FAO for outstanding progress in fighting hunger, ahead of the end-of-2015 MDG deadline. However, we did not stop there.

10. The government continues to address the issue of poverty through National Economic Policy which is implemented via the 5-year Economic Development Plan. The policy has resulted in the reduction of aggregate poverty from 8.9 percent to 1.7 percent for the period of 17 years between 1995 and 2012 through effective land reform and poverty eradication programmes such as, the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA) and 1AZAM Program. These programmes have successfully assisted many low-income earners to break free from poverty.

11. Undoubtedly, we have treaded a long way in food production. Compared to 40 to 50 years ago, food production has increased dramatically and defied the Malthusian theory. With new varieties, the

use of cutting-edge technologies and efficient management systems, we are now able to produce sufficient food thus far.

12. However, the pursuit of augmenting food and agriculture is unfortunately not getting easier. The world is now facing other challenges including climate change which observes the phenomena such as the rise of sea level, drought, flooding, and a long period of haze which all require urgent response measures.

13. Furthermore, increased frequency of drought and floods will affect crop production especially in subsistence sectors; the smallholders and subsistence farmers. Agriculture will therefore, have to cope with increased climate variability and more extreme weather events and at the same time, meet the increasing demand for food, feed, fibre and fuel, all of which, has the potential to irreversibly damage the natural resource on which agriculture depends on. It sure sounds very challenging.

14. Agriculture is thus, at a crossroad. It has to find ways to feed the world while being environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. I believe that this notion is the push behind FAO's initiative to achieve the newly launched sustainable development goals or SDGs, which offer a vision of a fairer, more prosperous, peaceful and sustainable world which is inclusive and does not leave anyone behind.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. I have just shared with you my thought on global scenario of food and agriculture. In line with the SDGs to achieve zero poverty and hunger, I wish to reaffirm on three approaches to ensure the food security and food sovereignty in this region.

16. The approaches are:

- Stimulate private-sector investment in agriculture;
- Address climate change issues with sustainable agriculture; and
- Reduce poverty by utilising biodiversity.

I firmly believe that these three approaches can further spur the region to better sustainable developments, and I hope there would be active discussions on these subjects to the benefit of the member countries.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. We have big tasks ahead of us. There are pertinent and critical matters to be deliberated to ensure food security and sovereignty in this region. Let us all put together our ideas and efforts to ensure the sustainability of our region and our future. As a famous quote by Colin Powell goes, "A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work."

18. I am optimistic that under the capable hands of FAO and, with commitments from all of you here, we will be able to work together to develop strategies towards more sustainable and efficient agriculture and food production in the future.

19. Once again, I wish all of you a productive and impactful conference. It is now my pleasure to officially declare the 33rd Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Regional Conference for the Asia and the Pacific open.

Thank you.

Note:

1. Current world population of 7.4 billion is projected to increase and reach 9.6 billion by 2050.
Source: UN Report: World Population Prospects: the 2012 Revision, 2013.

2. 1AZAM Program is an initiative under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development to improve the living of the low-income groups by providing job and business opportunities in various sectors particularly agriculture and service. The ultimate aim is to eradicate poverty. The program is made up of 4 components, namely:

- AZAM Kerja
- AZAM Tani
- AZAM Niaga
- AZAM Khidmat

3. Malthusian theory of population growth says, “The population multiplies geometrically and food arithmetically.” Source: Thomas Robert Malthus, 1798. His theory meant that the population grows faster than food production and that the growth will cease once there is no subsistence food available for human consumption. However, the current scenario of population growth has defied his theory where food production is increased tremendously and manages to support the world population.