

**WELCOMING REMARKS  
BY DATO' SRI AHMAD SHABERY CHEEK  
HONOURABLE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRO-BASED  
INDUSTRY MALAYSIA  
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF  
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED  
NATIONS  
33RD REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC  
(FAO APRC)  
10 MARCH 2016, PUTRAJAYA**

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and a very good morning.

*Yang Amat Berhormat Dato' Seri Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi,  
Deputy Prime Minister of 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 and Guests,*

*Members of the media, Ladies and Gentlemen.*

1. Let me start by extending our warmest welcome to all of you distinguished delegates, to the 33<sup>rd</sup> FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific, or APRC. As we say here in Malaysia, Selamat Datang.

2. We are also pleased and grateful by the presence of the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi at this momentous occasion. We look forward to your keynote address, Sir; it will certainly inspire a more robust discussion and set the perspective for our discourse in the next two days.

3. For your information Dato' Seri, APRC is one of five regional conferences, which functions as the FAO governing body to address opportunities and challenges in the region. This is the third APRC to be hosted by Malaysia. The first two, in 1962 and 1978, proved to be successful and fruitful. They say the third time's the charm, so the organising team has worked extra hard to make this Conference even more enjoyable and productive for all the 500 delegates from 46 countries.

4. To my fellow delegates, if you are in Putrajaya for the first time, I welcome you to explore the city and enjoy the sights. This garden city of Putrajaya is a symbol of our long journey of nationhood. A journey that started almost 6 decades ago, when our forefathers took over an impoverished country. A country with more than half of its population living below poverty line.

5. The wisdom of its leaders and the diligence of its people, saw Malaysia's poverty level reduced to 20 percent in 1987, and further down to less than 1 percent in 2014.

6. Growing in tandem with the reduction of poverty is our quest for food security for our people. Personally, Your Excellency Director General, I was truly inspired by the Fome Zero or Zero Hunger program in Brazil, that I understand you helped create and implement. Let me say that we would like to learn from you and your experience in this program, which successfully took 28 million people out of poverty.

7. Even though Malaysia has almost eliminated poverty and hunger, we understand the dynamic nature of both problems. Poverty comes, poverty goes, and poverty may strike again, depending on various factors and economic environment.

8. For a country like Malaysia, that has a sizeable part of its economy depending on oil, palm oil and rubber, income levels are susceptible to the prices of these commodities. The recent fall in prices has impacted a part of our population, especially those who are directly involved in related industries.

9. We believe that a responsible Government will never allow even a single citizen to be hungry, no matter how poor they are. Therefore, much like the aim of Zero Hunger in Brazil, we have devised a temporary social safety net program to help them weather these challenging times.

10. Through this program, which we call MyBeras, the Government plans to provide 20 kilograms of rice a month to about 120,000 of the country's hardcore poor families.

11. As we continue with our efforts to eradicate poverty and strengthen food security, a measure of success for the Government is the number of recipients of this MyBeras program. The more effective we are as a Government, we hope that less and less people will be in this program. And eventually there should be none.

12. On the other hand, a variety of programs are in place to provide a more sustainable push in the quest to uplift the living standards of our citizens. In fact, many of you would have seen some of these programs in action yesterday during your field trip.

13. In Kuala Langat, I believe you saw how young farmers were lifted out of poverty by giving them the knowledge and tools to operate a successful rock melon fertigation farm.

14. Meanwhile for those of you who chose to go to Batu Caves, you would have been to the food processing facility owned by Ramly Burger. Ramly is a household name in Malaysia, and it provides jobs to 25,000 so-called Burger Boys, which are basically young entrepreneurs

selling burgers by the roadside all over the country. This gives additional income of around USD 400 to USD 1,000 per month to them.

15. My fellow delegates, I am sure there are many more such programs even in your own countries. We look forward to the opportunity to learn from each other, as we conduct our meeting in the next two days. Apart from poverty and food security, the Putrajaya conference will also focus on the revitalising of rural economy, nutrition policies and investment, blue growth, as well as youth in future agriculture.

16. Malaysia joins other FAO member states in the Save Food Initiative. We are pleased that immediately after this opening ceremony, the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister will launch the MySaveFood campaign, signifying our commitment in this area. Moving forward, the Government is willing to work with any parties, including civil societies, to formulate a more concrete roadmap to address food waste.

17. Malaysia also welcomes the initiative mooted by FAO to highlight the importance of pulses in this region. Dato' Seri, there will be a launching of the International Year of Pulses 2016 right after this opening ceremony.

18. One last item before I end – on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Malaysia, I would like to invite all APCR member countries to participate in our upcoming Malaysia Agriculture, Horticulture and Agrotourism Show or MAHA 2016, which will be held from November 24 to December 4 in Kuala Lumpur.

19. From its inception in 1923, MAHA has today grown into the region's leading agricultural expo, attracting 2,500 booths and close to 3.5 million visitors in 2014. This biennial event brings together industry players and professionals from various agriculture sectors. It is the perfect platform for you to showcase your products as well as to explore opportunities and markets for your companies.

20. Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, I would like to thank the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister for gracing our conference with his presence. Thank you Sir, your being here is a testament for the importance of agriculture in the development of this country.

21. Let me also once again thank all delegates, especially the Honourable Ministers for making your way here to Putrajaya. It is truly our pleasure hosting all of you. Our appreciation also to FAO and the organizing team from the Ministry who worked very hard over the past couple of months to make this Conference a success.

22. With that, thank you and wabillahitaufig walhidayah wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.