

As delivered

Statement of H.E. Wilfred J. Ngirwa

**Independent Chairperson of the Council to the 40th Session of the
FAO Conference (Rome, 3-8 July 2017)**

Mr Chairperson, Excellencies, Director-General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to begin by offering my congratulations to The Honourable Emmanuel F. Piñol, Secretary for Agriculture of the Philippines, on his election as Chairperson of this Fortieth Session of the FAO Conference. I wish Mr Piñol well as he guides us through this intense week of deliberations.

And I would like to thank Mr Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, for delivering a perceptive and stimulating McDougall Lecture, the keynote speech that sets the tone for the Conference.

I also wish to acknowledge the statement made by the Director-General, which Delegates will bear in mind during the deliberations that will take place in this Plenary Hall, and in the Commissions, throughout this week. I am sure we all appreciated the forward-looking and constructive approach, which characterizes not only Mr Graziano's address to the Conference, but also his leadership of this Organization.

As many of you will know, this is the second time that I have the honour to address the Conference in my role as Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council and now that I have reached the end of my second term of office, I should like to share some reflections on the past four years. But, before I start highlighting Council's recent past, please allow me to reflect briefly on the state of food and agriculture across the globe.

We have already heard from the previous speakers about the challenges impacting on food security and nutrition. Clearly the world has witnessed significant leaps in technology and innovation that have provided incomparable opportunities for increased agricultural production.

These positive trends should not, however, detract our attention from the continuing threats posed by: climate change, to which agriculture not only has to adapt, but also has an important mitigation role; unsustainable production practices; inequalities in income; displacement and migration – all these factors, and many more which jointly hinder our efforts to fight hunger and malnutrition. FAO is in the middle of this complex situation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, since 2012 FAO and its Members have embarked on a joint exercise to decide how the Organization should be positioned to ensure its efficiency and effectiveness in a world struggling with complex and protracted crises.

Furthermore, as we are all aware from our experience at the national level, resources for development are ever more scarce, and this calls for prioritization of FAO activities and programmes.

Under the leadership of the Director-General, and within the constraints of available resources, FAO Management and Members, in line with the Director-General's "strategic thinking process", re-focused the strategic direction of the Organization.

The outcome of this process was the setting out of five comprehensive Strategic Objectives upon which the work of the Organization was aligned.

The structural reform of the Organization has led to a streamlined and effective headquarters and a further consolidation of the decentralized offices.

The structural reform of the Organization was complimented by the reform of its governance structure and in this regard I believe it is particularly significant that consensus on the budget level for 2018-19 was found upstream of this Session, when, in May 2017, the Council agreed to forward a draft resolution on budgetary appropriations to this session of Conference for approval. This was also the case in March 2015, and was referred to as an "historic consensus" at that time.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this constructive outcome is due in large measure to the willingness of Members to work productively with each other, and also with management, within the context of the Strategic Framework, in order to reach consensus.

I am therefore grateful to Members and Management alike, for your readiness to engage with complex and sometimes divisive issues in a frank and respectful manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I should like to briefly run through some key issues discussed by the Council over the past four years. My intention is to give you a sense of my perception, also the range and scope of the work covered during the ten sessions I chaired from 2013 to 2017. . Some of these issues became recurring themes over the period, and some were also discussed in informal inter-sessional consultations, often mandated by the Council itself.

I know some Members will recall that it took a decade-long reform process, and many sessions of Council and Working Groups, to develop the Council's present business-like and transparent decision-making processes. Indeed, I am in the privileged position of having seen governance reforms coming to fruition over the past decade, as I was Vice-chairperson of the process.

Looking back over the past four years, I can confirm that positive changes did occur, and that the way Council works today is undoubtedly more focused and more efficient.

For example, Council's constructive approach was very evident during my first mandate when we built up a good team dynamic in the FAO/WHO Joint Working Group that negotiated the two outcome documents of the *Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2)*. This led to a successful ICN2 in November 2014.

Later, in December 2014 the Council tasked me with leading an Open-ended Working Group on FAO's work on Antimicrobial Resistance. The outcome of these informal meetings was a Conference Resolution adopted unanimously by the Conference at its last session in June 2015.

Subsequently, I was mandated by the Council to hold consultations with the regional groups, and open to all Members, with a view to reaching agreement on the proposed rules for participation of Civil Society Organizations and Private Sector Representatives in FAO meetings. Again, informal inter-sessional consultations were the basis of the decision by Council to maintain the *status quo* in this key aspect of FAO's activities.

Likewise, the outcome of the important review of decentralized offices was discussed constructively and negotiated through informal meetings and led to a clear decision by the Council and Conference.

All of the decision-making processes combined informal negotiations among Members, with high value input by Management, in an informal setting before Governing Bodies endorsed our decisions formally.

Chairperson, before concluding these brief remarks, I would like to express my gratitude to the Chairpersons of the Programme Committee, Finance Committee and Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters. I am grateful to them for their unfailing support throughout their terms of office.

I am also very grateful to the Chairpersons of the Technical Committees and the Regional Conferences.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as well as reaching the end of my four years as Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, I am also completing a thirteen-year period in Rome.

Before becoming Independent Chairperson of the Council, I served as Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the Rome UN-based Agencies; that is, FAO, IFAD and WFP. I am happy that the collaboration of the three Rome UN-based agencies has enhanced its effectiveness and efficiency.

I am grateful to the Government of Tanzania for having assigned me with this important role and subsequently for having nominated me for the Office of Independent Chairperson.

I am also grateful to all Members for having made my task much easier by coming to talk to me informally about emerging issues. I would also like to thank our Host Country, the Republic of Italy, for its constant and generous support for FAO.

Likewise, I have also had many opportunities, whether as Permanent Representative of my country or as Independent Chairperson of Council, to appreciate how the FAO Secretariat provides highly professional and reliable assistance both during and between sessions of the Council and other Governing Bodies.

Before concluding let me remark on the ability of a multilateral Organization like FAO to work with Members to find solutions to the intricate global issues and crises that afflict the contemporary world in the field of food and agriculture.

The complexity of the challenges we face requires, more often than not, a degree of compromise by all parties. And compromise is, of course, easier to achieve in a forum such as the Council, where respect for diversity of opinion is a guiding principle.

Mr Chairperson, please now allow me to conclude by saying how much I am indebted to my loving wife and family for having constantly supported me here in Rome, and at a distance. I would never have been able to carry out my functions as Ambassador, and then as Independent Chairperson, without their patience, understanding and encouragement.

I am grateful to them for that, as I am grateful to Almighty God for having granted me sufficiently good health to face what have been both rewarding and challenging years.

Mr Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention.