

As delivered

**Acceptance Speech of Hon. Emmanuel F. Piñol
Secretary of Agriculture
Republic of the Philippines**

As Chairperson of the 40th Session of the UN FAO Conference
FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy July 3, 2017

**ZERO HUNGER FOR ALL OF HUMANITY
MUST BE A SHARED MISSION OF NATIONS**

His Excellency, Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Director General Jose Graziano da Silva, Excellencies, Heads of Delegations, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please allow me to first thank the Honorable Director General Jose Graziano da Silva of the Food and Agriculture Organization for his warm welcome and kind introductory remarks, and on behalf of my President, Rodrigo Roa Duterte, and the Filipino people, express our deepest appreciation to him for leading the FAO in coming to our aid in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan and the continuing support of FAO to the Philippines.

The gesture of concern and compassion by Señor Da Silva and the FAO, along with the FAO donor countries and partners, during the most difficult times when almost 10,000 Filipinos lost their lives will always be remembered by a grateful nation.

It is with deep humility that I accept this rare honour of presiding the 40th Session of the FAO Conference.

On a personal note, I consider this election to the Chairmanship of the 40th Session as a victory of the ordinary family farmer for I lay claim to the distinction of being the first practicing farmer to be appointed as Secretary of Agriculture in my country.

Let me thank my colleagues and the members of the Asia Group for their trust and confidence and for nominating me to Chair this very important conference.

I also would like to thank the inspirational presence of two leaders of the Philippine Legislature - Senator Cynthia Villar, chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture of the Philippine Senate and Congressman Jose Panganiban, chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture of the Philippine Congress.

We now gather in this historic and hallowed hall during the most critical times in the history of humanity when the ability and capability of nations to produce food for their people face a new threat - Climate Change.

As one of the five countries in the world greatly affected by Climate Change, we have learned our lessons and with modest resources, our government has made adjustments.

We will share these experiences with other countries in my presentation of the Philippine Statement during this conference.

Just as alarming as the threat of Climate Change is the recorded downtrend in the investments made by government in agriculture and fisheries over the last few years.

Over the years, governments have been spending less for food production than they do for defence, infrastructure and education.

Billions of dollars have been spent by governments to perfect precision bombs but the development of precision farming technology has largely been left to the private sector.

Statistics provided by the FAO showed that the average public expenditure for agriculture of 51 countries from 1982 to 2007 steadily went down from 7.8% to 4.2%.

While we do not have the latest data on this, it is safe to say that if the downtrend continues, people in many countries around the world would suffer from food shortages in the coming years.

If this is left unchecked, the outcome could be catastrophic because it would not only result in reduced food production but also in massive poverty in the countryside and continued migration to the urban centers by people from the rural areas thus creating a serious social problem.

Food security is National Security.

When there are no roads, people would make their own trails; where there are no classrooms, students could gather under the shade of trees; when there is an armed conflict, negotiations could stop the war.

But there is nothing that could stop hungry people from staging riots.

It is a must therefore that we remind our governments that there should be more investments in agriculture not only to ensure availability and affordability of food but also to reduce poverty in the countryside.

Please allow me to end this message with this gentle reminder.

While we are here to represent our governments and our countries, while we belong to different nationalities, while we speak different languages, while we are separated by political boundaries, the truth is that we belong to one global community.

As members of this global family, we all must endeavour to contribute to the attainment of the Zero Hunger Advocacy and the Agenda 2030 as a whole, and ensure that no child and no human being would ever to go sleep at night with an empty stomach.

Thank you and may the Spirit of Brotherhood and the Love for Humanity prevail and guide us in the duration of this Conference.

I welcome you all to the 40th Session of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Conference.