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INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON DROUGHT AND AGRICULTURE

PREDICT, PLAN, PREPARE: STOP DROUGHT BECOMING A FAMINE

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Excellencies,

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank my colleagues at FAO, and the co-organizers – the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of The Netherlands, for organizing this forward-looking seminar.

For those of us working to fight hunger and poverty, there is heartbreak at the magnitude of the suffering in those parts of the world hit by persisting drought.

There is also a growing sense of frustration. Because there is nothing unforeseen or unpredictable about the situation the world finds itself in now.

For many years, scientists and those working on the frontlines have warned of the increasing rate of drought and desertification – and with it not only hunger and famine, but also a higher risk of war, social disorder, political instability and forced migration.

Today's meeting calls on all of us to "predict, plan and prepare" – it is important that we respond not just to the emergencies of today, but can also prevent tomorrow's.

We live on a planet that is getting hotter, and more crowded, every day. Many developing countries are being hit hard by volatile weather. Climate change is increasing the scale of risk for the agriculture sector, and also contributing to making droughts even more severe.

We cannot afford to be haphazard in our approach to drought, at a time when we need to increase global food production to feed a growing and more demanding population.

Today, our focus is on Africa, but we all know that drought affects all regions across Asia, Europe and the Americas. Drylands cover more than 40 per cent of the earth and are home to more than 2 billion people.

My institution, IFAD, was created in the 1970s in response to drought and famine – in recognition of the fact that drought has a disproportionate impact on those who live in extreme poverty in the rural areas of developing countries.

IFAD is not an emergency response or a humanitarian relief agency. Instead, we work to build the lasting resilience of poor rural people, and the eco-systems they depend on. In this way, we work to prevent disasters from occurring in the first place.

For example, we have supported early warning systems in parts of Ethiopia and The Sudan that enable rural populations to proactively respond to drought warnings –such as by using drought resistant seeds.

And later this year, we will be working on natural resources management and water resources development in Angola, as part of the country's Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, in collaboration with FAO, the UNDP and the World Bank.

We believe that investing in the resilience of small family farmers is also an investment in the resilience of communities and of food systems.

Eighty per cent of the world's poorest people – it is important that we remind ourselves of this -- and most of the world's under-nourished – live in rural areas. Agriculture – especially rain-fed agriculture -- is their main source of income. This makes them especially vulnerable during periods of drought.

Climate change has compounded the risks poor rural people have to face. We are working to make our entire portfolio climate-sensitive, and in 2012, IFAD established the Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme -- or ASAP -- to channel climate finance directly to smallholder farmers.

this programme – ASAP - allows IFAD to scale-up proven climate change adaptation methods – such as mixed crop and livestock production – increasing agricultural productivity while diversifying risks.

ASAP is investing in a number of areas to build resilience including, more systematic analysis of climate risk and vulnerability; innovation to boost the capacity of farmers and their organizations to manage climate risks; as well as scaling up sustainable agricultural techniques.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Experience shows that it is possible for smallholders to increase their income from agriculture while being more resilient to climate shocks – even in drylands and drought-prone areas. Let me to outline four steps that can yield real and lasting benefits.

First, development yields the best results when projects are country-owned and locally led. In Ethiopia, for example, farmers were trained in more sustainable water usage, water harvesting techniques and how to rehabilitate degraded soils. Small-scale irrigation schemes owned and managed by the farmers have helped them become less dependent on rainfall cycles.

Second, we must invest more in innovation and technology. For example, in Mozambique, El Niño reduced rainfall to less than 60 per cent last year. Yet in the nearby Maputo and Limpopo corridors, farmers have doubled their target yields of cassava. How? Through access to improved seeds and training in planting and weeding. Good agronomy solves so many problems through technology and innovation.

In Morocco, 15 solar-powered stations are measuring temperature, humidity, radiation, and wind speed and providing the data to farmers in real time, along with extension advice over the phone. Thanks to this technology, they can then make informed decisions about the best times to plant and how to deal with drought.

Third, we need to work with governments to plan and be prepared for future droughts. We may not be able to prevent calamities, but we can – and do have the responsibility - to predict, plan and prepare so that we can mitigate loss and suffering.

Fourth, we can reach more people and be more effective if we work in partnership. The coordinated approach taken by the Rome-based agencies in drought-affected countries I want to believe is yielding results. In South Sudan, for example, IFAD worked with WFP on a project that reduced food insecurity by estimated 20 per cent, brought chronic malnutrition down to 13 per cent from 48 per cent in children under 5 by the time the project closed a year ago. It also provided access to safe drinking water and sanitation for more than 38,000 people in this community alone.

In Kenya, we are working with FAO and WFP on a programme designed to help 100,000 cereal farmers become climate resilient in eight semi-arid counties that are home to more than 5 million people.

Linking smallholders to financial services, and to crop and livestock insurance, are other important steps that build resilience. And that is the current challenge we are dealing with in the aftermath of the droughts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must not under-estimate the urgency of the situation. But nor must we throw our hands up in despair. By working together and targeting our investments, we can break the cycle of crisis, disaster and relief – and in so doing we can ensure that every person on earth has a better and sustainable future.

Thank you.