

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Heads of States, Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Esteemed Ministers, Excellency the Director-General of FAO, Distinguished Representatives of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honor for me to participate in the inauguration of this important Conference and to share with you some thoughts about recent events that have put global food security at risk. I am referring specifically to three challenges which make up the agenda of this Conference: namely the sudden world-wide upsurge in the prices of basic food commodities, especially cereals, the excessive enthusiasm for biofuel production in some developed and developing countries, and the challenges of climate change that is affecting our entire planet. I shall try to limit my statement to the recent difficulties encountered by the people of Afghanistan which arise from these challenges.

However, before talking about these issues, I would like to affirm the support of my Government for the fundamental principle of “access of all people at all times to sufficient and nutritionally adequate and safe food”. We consider this principle to be a core component of the Declaration of Human Rights.

Mr. Chairman! With the sudden disruption of food imports from our neighboring countries, the price of bread, which is the chief item in the diet of our population, has been increased over a very short period. Those who are suffering most from this price shock are the rural and urban poor, the civil servants, and the small farmers who are traditionally net buyers of cereals. Close to Millions of inhabitants of Afghanistan are severely affected by the recent surge in food commodity prices.

It must also be said that our farmers, particularly small farmers who are the predominant players in Afghanistan's agriculture, are suffering from rising process of agriculture inputs.

Mr. Chairman! It appears that the recent price rise in food commodities will not be a passing phenomenon, but is likely to persist for an extended period due to three principal reasons: First, the world population is expected to reach 9 billion by the year 2050 and almost all this increase of 2.5 billion will occur in developing countries. Second, the purchasing power of the population in the world's emerging economies is rapidly increasing. Those who benefit most from this increase wish to consume more meat and dairy products which, in turn, increases the demand for coarse grains to maintain high animal productivity. Third, climate change is likely to have a negative impact on the performance of ecosystems in the majority of developing countries, especially those suffering from water stress.

Mr. Chairman! Food aid is intended to provide temporary relief. It can not serve as a long-term solution to the problem of food insecurity. National food security can be achieved by means of improving and augmenting the production capacity of farmers and herders, while at the same time providing a social safety net for those who are vulnerable to economic shocks and climatic disturbances.

Distinguished delegates! Afghanistan neither has the land resources nor the necessary water supply to embark on the large-scale planting of crops suitable for befool production. In order to meet our long-term energy needs we aim to develop our hydro-electric potential for the national grid, in addition to developing solar and wind energy generation in order to satisfy the needs of local communities and people residing in remote areas.

On a global scale, it is our conviction that sustainable bio-fuel production should remain in total harmony with the safeguarding of world food security. To achieve this, the international community needs to establish and put into practice firm guidelines for the production of ethanol and bio-diesel derived from food crops. Investment in developing new technologies for bio-fuel production from non-food crops needs to be encouraged through appropriate legislation. Consideration should also be given to the recent studies which claim that feedstock production systems for bio-fuels are carbon neutral, meaning to say that they emit as much carbon dioxide as they absorb.

On climate change we are still not sure how this will affect agriculture in Afghanistan across its different agro-ecological zones. However, with the rise in temperature the snow will melt earlier and there will be heavy flooding in early spring followed by severe water scarcity in the summer when irrigation is crucial in order to bring crops to maturity. Unless water is stored behind large and medium-size dams, the potential benefits to agriculture from high precipitation in the mountainous regions look somewhat problematic, based on the available scientific knowledge.

In our low land areas, which are mainly arid and semi-arid, scientific analysis so far points to the possible occurrence of severe periodic droughts and very considerable reduction in crop yields, The areas used for pasture are likely to be negative affected as has been the case this year. In some areas crop production may become entirely unsustainable. To sum up, based on the current scientific knowledge climate change will not have any beneficial effects on the farming systems employed in Afghanistan. Moreover, a considerable amount of crop and animal adaptation technology will be needed to forestall the negative effects of climate change.

Finally, Mr. Chairman! Afghanistan fully supports the Declaration presented to this High-level Conference and it is our hope that it will be adopted by consensus.

I thank you all for your kind attention.