

ETHIOPIA

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Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Mr. Director-General of FAO,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

In behalf of the Government and People of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, my Delegation would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, together with the United Nations World Food Programme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and Biodiversity International in behalf of the CGIAR,*** for convening this timely Conference.

In 1974, the United Nations World Food Conference, held in Rome from 5th to 16th November, was entrusted with developing "ways and means" whereby the international community, as a whole, could take specific action to resolve the world food crisis within the broader context of development and international cooperation. And some of the decisions made included (1) to eradicate hunger within a decade (2) the creation of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to help the rural poor. Such bold decisions were made despite the prevailing cold war environment, the world was less wealthier at the time, technological advancement in general and information and communications technology in particular did not reach the present level.

As many speakers emphasized during the last couple of days, the challenges include climate change, ever rising fuel prices, bioenergy issues and soaring food prices. And the attention of the whole world is focussed on the outcome of this Conference.

Today the world as a whole is much wealthier and more technologically advanced. The question arises as to what extent this Conference is prepared to meet the expectations of humankind.

Mr. Chairman,

That said, we do not lose sight of the fact that the primary responsibility of ensuring food security rests on the shoulders of national authorities, together with their local administrations and communities.

In light of this perspective, let me briefly focus on what my Government has been doing to ensure food security both at national and household levels.

Agriculture is a critical sector in Ethiopia where over 80% of our people still live in rural areas and depend greatly on farming for their livelihood. It contributes over 40% to GDP and over 80% to exports. In this regard, a policy and strategy of agricultural development-led industrialization (ADLI), which is rural and smallholder farmer-centred, has been implemented since 1995.

The tools used in the implementation include:

- Creating awareness and sense of ownership of the policy and strategy among all stakeholders at all levels;
- Strengthening implementation capacity;
- Packaging and dissemination of technological innovations;
- Encouraging farmers to diversify and produce more market-oriented crops;
- Creating micro finance institutions;
- Expansion of education and health services;
- Encouraging establishment of farmers associations, etc.

The Government has also launched Food Security Programme, which is aimed at addressing the underlying causes of chronic and transitory food insecurity. Some of its major components are the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) and Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transitions to More Sustainable Livelihoods (MERET).

The Government has further decided to move from a disaster relief system to a risk management system that would allow the protection of developmental gains from being wiped out by a major drought. This is a progress from an appeals-based ad-hoc emergency response to managing risk in an ex-ante fashion. Instead of reacting to impending crises, the Government wants to manage risks pro-actively. In an attempt to generate predictable contingency funding to a weather crisis, weather pilot insurance scheme was piloted in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP). The pilot project has made important progress and contributes to the broader objectives.

In accordance with the African Union's agricultural development framework of 2003, which commits all African countries to invest at least 10% of their budget in agriculture, Ethiopia has been investing 17% of its budget in agriculture and has been attaining impressive growth results during the last five years.

Efforts are also being exerted in the area of sustainable environment management. One of the ongoing activities in this regard and worth sharing relates to that of the New Ethiopian Millennium.

While much of the world celebrated the year 2000 eight years ago, Ethiopia welcomed its Millennium on 12 September, 2007. This is one of the diversities in Ethiopia's culture that has been maintained for millennia. The New Millennium is considered by its citizens to be a new chapter in the annals of the country's history, and they have taken it upon themselves as an opportunity to forge unity and renew their fight against hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

Several projects that involve entire citizenry have been designed, among which is the project "to plant two-trees for 2000" during the year, by which time hundreds of millions of trees would have been planted and cared for. Such efforts could be one of the mitigation measures undertaken by rural people in the face of climate change.

Ethiopia is a non-oil producing country; it is totally dependent on imports. Rising prices of oil is impacting on all its imports, and these in turn are impacting on the domestic market. The prices of food and other services and goods have increased, and are threatening the developmental gains achieved hitherto.

The Government has taken a two-track approach: 1) short-term measures; and 2) long-term measures.

Short-term measures include:

- Subsidised cereal supply and edible oil distributed for low-income urban dwellers until prices stabilize;
- Value-added and turnover taxes removed on food grains and flour;
- Government importing wheat for state subsidized distribution;

Long-term measures include:

- Accelerated implementation of the smallholder farming and rural-centred development, and achieve high agricultural production and productivity growth throughout the whole country.
- Creation of a commodity exchange centre to facilitate favourable marketing environment both for producers and consumers.

Our developmental efforts are supported by our development partners. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for their continued support in fighting against poverty and ensuring food security.

Thank you.