

Statement by H.E. Mr. Arefaine Berhe

Minister of Agriculture

The State of Eritrea

During

THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON NUTRITION (ICN 2)

19-21 November 2014, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy

Honourable Chairperson,
Your Excellencies Heads of Delegation
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to join previous speakers to express my utmost gratitude to the organizers of this august forum for the warm hospitality accorded to us.

The Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) could not have been convened at a more propitious time. Rapid advancement on agricultural sciences and especially biotechnology and nutrition science, communication technologies, research and overall global wealth afford us, on the one hand, substantial levers to marshal our collective resources as well as emulate best practices and methodologies to eliminate hunger and malnutrition on a global scale. I am not referring here to the abstract, aggregated, sense of the term but to its tangible and more meaningful dimensions in terms of eradication of hunger and malnutrition at the national and household levels in all corners of our global community.

There are of course countervailing forces, including global warming that risks wreaking havoc to global agricultural produce, morally reprehensible global and national income inequalities, and other externalities that continue to put impediments to the realization of the noble aspirations that we all share and that have prompted the convening of this forum.

As aptly highlighted in the available literature on the main theme of this Second Conference, nutrition security is a cross-cutting issue that has to be approached in a holistic manner with the active involvement of all stakeholders. In this respect, the participation today of senior members of the executive and legislative branches of government, non-state actors and other interested parties augurs well for enhancing vital unity of purpose and action as we contemplate concrete plans of action towards achieving the stated objective of the Conference in the period ahead.

Excellencies,

The Government of Eritrea has devoted much time, resources and energy to implement core elements of the parameters that I have briefly touched upon earlier. The attainment of food-security – both at the national and household level - was taken as the country's top priority from 2005 onwards and the necessary resources marshaled towards the achievement of this objective in spite of substantial other challenges and constraints. Erratic rainfall in an ecologically vulnerable geographic setting; outdated and largely subsistence farming methods; nascent research institutions and capabilities; investment and water infrastructure shortages that have inhibited rapid mechanization and modernization of agriculture have all combined to render the objective as work in progress to-date. Nonetheless, much progress has already been made in terms of infrastructural preparations, institutional set-up as well as professional training and research work. In brief, in spite of various challenges, the country has already gone a long way to address the supply side

of the equation and to ensure adequate harvest for domestic consumption as well as export of high-value crops on a sustainable basis both during lean and bountiful years. The national food security strategy also encompasses household agricultural supplement programmes of micro credit extension for poultry, honey production etc.

At the nutritional level, the Government has formed an Inter-Ministerial body that consists of the Ministers of Agriculture, Marine Resources, Health, Trade and Industry as well as Standards Institute. The Inter-Ministerial body is assisted by a technical committee that has experts from all the Ministries cited above as well as relevant professionals from the institutions of tertiary education and research centers in the country. These bodies are working to coordinate the formulation of the necessary policies, programmes and regulations to ensure availability of micro-nutrient-rich foods on the supply-side at the national level and to enhance awareness through continuous media outlets and other forums, at the individual/house hold level.

In view of various constraints, it is clear that these objectives will only be achieved fully in the long-term through gradual and incremental milestones in the interim period. But, in the meantime and principally as a stop-gap measure, the Government has prioritized the incorporation of maternal health and nutrition activities as part and parcel of the Primary Health Care Programme. In this respect, the priorities for improving maternal nutrition have expanded coverage with iron/folate supplements, dietary counseling for pregnancy and lactation, as

well as increasing support from community and family members to reduce work-loads and improve diets.

Excellencies,

Let me conclude by highlighting the following:

- The objectives we aspire to achieve will require global solidarity and exchange of experiences and best practices. In this respect, it is essential that resources and expertise continue to be provided by our development partners under the auspices of the FAO and WHO;
- Food production will not be sustainable if it is pursued, as indeed was the case in some instances, at the cost of irreversible environmental degradation. There is thus an urgent need to address this dichotomy in a manner that would ensure long-term sustainability.
- Excessive volatility of prices of food and agricultural commodities are negatively impacting food and nutrition security. This recurrent problem requires continuous monitoring and the availability of practical packages as a cushion of its occurrence.

I thank you