

FAO - World Conference on Nutrition

November 19th, 2014

**Welcome message by the Honourable Ignazio Marino,
Mayor of Rome**

Let me first welcome you all to Rome. It is a pleasure for me to host the second World Conference on Nutrition that the FAO and the World Health Organization have jointly organized.

I also wish to extend a warm welcome to the thousands of delegates who have come to Rome for this important occasion and that our city is honoured and proud to receive.

A deep appreciation finally goes to Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, and José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of FAO: thank you for having organized the Second World Conference on Nutrition in Rome.

I wish to underline that our city is proud to host on its own territory the three United Nations' food agencies: IFAD, FAO and World Food Programme, together with Biodiversity International, are actively working for Food Security, Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture.

The Roman City Council conferred the honorary citizenship on these three UN agencies in April 2013.

The World Conference on Nutrition is entitled:

“Better nutrition, better lives”

I take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation for the decision of the United Nations to proclaim 2014 "International Year of Family Farming". As José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of FAO, emphasized: “Nothing comes closer to the sustainable food production paradigm than family farming”.

An important decision by which the United Nations has acknowledged the role played in the world economy by millions of family farms, represented by more than 350 organizations from 60 countries gathered at the World Rural Forum.

The focus on the world of small family farms and the role they play in the production of healthy food, environmental protection and biodiversity is crucial.

Small family farming is a key resource in the fight against hunger and malnutrition, as pointed out by the World Food Day entitled "Family Agriculture. Feeding the world, protecting the planet " which took place on 16th October.

The promotion of the family farming potential for eradicating hunger and poverty, providing food security, protecting environment and biodiversity aligns perfectly with the Millennium Development Goals that Rome has always supported and practically endorsed.

We are convinced that it is necessary today to pursue the promotion of family farming and local agriculture in general.

Italy takes a great interest in these issues.

47% of agricultural holdings in our country cover an area of less than one or two hectares.

And in these difficult economic and social times, it is the agricultural sector which has been recording a positive trend of youth employment.

If Italy takes a strong interest in issues related to family farming considering it indispensable for a sustainable future, Rome has the same conviction.

Our city is the largest agricultural town in Europe, with an area of 51.729 hectares on a global area of 128.530 hectares, equal to 40% of the global area of the Capital.

An extraordinary territory, rich in biodiversity, excellence production and undertakings where agriculture represents a true vocation.

For this reason, the use and preservation of the agricultural heritage is one of our major objectives. We have been promoting the development of local organic farming and supporting innovation in cooperation with local agricultural realities, Roman universities, research centres and agrarian institutes.

This is also demonstrated by the fact that, according to moral obligation that requires us to defend lands and preserve their fruits, Rome is taking the necessary steps to struggle against new exploitation patterns in the context of globalization applied to the land, that are irreversibly destroying entire rural communities especially in the poorest countries of the world.

Rome is playing its part with determination. The City is supporting and assisting associations and networks activities which are working on issues like security and food sovereignty.

In our view, the agricultural heritage represents a crucial element of economic recovery, but at the same time, an exceptional environmental and cultural value.

We believe that our land must be defended, because our future and the quality of life on our planet depend on it.

And this is why Rome lays special emphasis on the growth and ecologically sustainable development of its territory.

We have the duty to preserve this unique Roman territory and strengthen the agricultural production and its transformation in a perspective of local production

recovery, always in accordance with a combination between culture and environment which is essential for us.

On August 2013, only two months after our installation, we have stopped a tender notice that would have created an overbuilding in the “Agro Romano”, the Roman countryside, on an area equal to 2.365 hectares on 161 different sites.

We proudly claim the stop of this measure, because we think that soils must be defended; they should not be consumed at all costs.

Besides the promotion of our agricultural heritage, we must give a concrete contribution to the economic recovery and create a new impetus that deals with environment, health protection and a new culture.

We want to gradually build a new social fabric, based on working and other rights.

Based also on cohesion and sharing.

In compliance with our policy, rural communities and young farmers' businesses will develop within a few days in places where buildings were supposed to rise up and on other abandoned and uncultivated lands.

We have assigned to young farmers 100 hectares of land, divided into 4 lots.

The assignment of these lands which is the result of a public competition, is a real investment for the future of sustainable development.

Indeed, we have asked to the competition winners to take care of this common good and give it added value, giving

back services and social initiatives to the community and neighbourhood.

In this way the agricultural lands owned by the city will not only be protected from concrete constructions, but it will give impetus to young people who will become the main source of new business and innovation in agriculture, in accordance with the principle of biodiversity.

Rome is thus the first in Italy to have translated into action the provisions of the Decree-Law No. 1 of 2012, in which the terms for the assignment of disused public agricultural land to young people under 40 years of age are clarified

In December, we will be ready to launch a new public competition, which provides for the allocation of an additional 500 hectares of agro Romano, registered in the municipal heritage as a result of urbanistic compensations.

The two public competitions that will allocate land to farmers and young entrepreneurs are very important for us for the care of our land, as well as its social and scientific progress.

An initiative which is part of the strategic project "Rome, a city to cultivate," for productive, environmental and landscape recovery of the Agro-Romano and the spread of culture and agricultural practices among the population.

Within our Strategic Plan we have developed the first municipal regulation of urban gardens for promoting fruit and vegetable crops in rural and suburban districts and allowing citizens a better and more conscious use of the territory.

An extraordinary reality made up of many spontaneous initiatives, which have enriched our city with added social and environmental value.

In order to support the small-scale local agriculture and strengthen the short supply chain - the so-called "zero Km" campaign - Rome has created a Farmer's Market network for promoting the Agro romano products, for helping small farmers active in the municipal and provincial territory, for containing costs and ensuring "traceability" of the product.

Furthermore, Rome manages four Agricultural enterprises. Two of them are biological farms that deal with crop sector (mainly cereal production) and animal husbandry.

Finally, the **Roman Farmhouses Network**, whose activities - aimed at children, pupils of primary and secondary schools, families - intend to enhance the relationship between town and countryside as well as the social role of agriculture, and promote food education, consumption awareness and the importance of biodiversity.

These are the activities that Rome is committed in for the ecologically sustainable development of its territory.

Because we believe that agriculture can become strategic for a different future, where productivity made of new rules can re-create the connection with our land and become the crucial element for our Roman countryside.

All this is very important for us and it is through these actions that we confirm the will to be on the side of the United Nations, with whom we share the commitment to support small family farms for the defence of the territory and biodiversity.

Thank you all and once again welcome to Rome!