

Launch of the Second Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and
Agriculture

by

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Distinguished Guests,

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you today to the launch of *The Second Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*. This Report is a health check on what steps are being taken to protect plant genetic resources and how their use can be amplified to increase food security since the First Report was produced by FAO in 1998. It also focuses on the vital issues and needs that urge our immediate attention. I am pleased to state that all member countries, relevant regional and international organizations, civil society and the private sector actively contributed to the preparation of this report. We thank them all. I especially wish to acknowledge member countries for the valuable information they provided, Bioversity International and the donors who supported the process.

Much has changed during the twelve years between the two reports. There has been a surge in awareness of how important it is to preserve and protect the genetic diversity of food crops. It

began with the adoption of the 'Global Plan of Action on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture' in 1996, and was followed by the adoption of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in 2001. This foremost treaty of the 21st century secured a unique multilateral system for access to and benefit-sharing of plant genetic resources for food security. In addition, the Global Crop Diversity Trust and the Svalbard Seed Vault have been established to support the implementation of the Treaty and to ensure the safeguarding of seed diversity for our future needs.

FAO has been engaged very closely in delivering these milestones.

However the Report reminds us that we cannot rest on our laurels. The world's population is expected to reach 9.1 billion by 2050. In the next 25 years cereal production alone must increase by almost 50 percent while ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources. Climate change is adding an immediate and unprecedented threat to food security, in particular for hundreds of millions of people who depend on family agriculture. There is also a rising demand for quality and variety of food.

The sustainable use of plant diversity on a large scale could hold the key to meet these challenges. There are thousands of crop wild relatives still to be collected, evaluated and documented. These species hold the genetic secrets that enable them to resist heat, drought, floods and pests. New and better-adapted crops derived from genetic diversity can offer more nutritious and healthier foods for rural and urban consumers, and provide opportunities to generate additional income and contribute to sustainable rural development.

The use of improved varieties has contributed to 50% of the increases in the global crop yield in the past 30 years. Ensuring the continuity of such tendency is a real challenge. This is the reason why seed systems must be strengthened – both through the public sector and by developing local seed enterprises – to make these new varieties instantly available to farmers.

This is the thrust of the Report today. It is essential to collect and preserve seeds in genebanks. It is equally important to recognize their value and ensure that farmers have access not only to this diversity but also to the adapted varieties that might derive from it. There is an urgent need to strengthen linkages among institutions dealing with PGRFA and food security, and with other stakeholders, at global, regional, national, and local levels. Far greater efforts are required to counteract the effects of longstanding underinvestment in agriculture, rural development and food security.

It is essential, therefore, in this International Year of Biodiversity, that there be worldwide mobilization, for its conservation and sustainable utilization for the benefit of all of us. It is my sincere hope that this Second Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture will play an important role towards that goal.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.