

*As delivered*

International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development  
FAO Headquarters, Rome  
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Opening Statement  
by  
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Your Excellencies,  
Minister Altero Matteoli  
Sen. Alfredo Mantica  
Vice Mayor of Rome Mrs Mariapia Garavaglia  
Minister Børge Brende  
Mr Patrizio Civili  
Ministers and Ambassadors, Heads of Organizations, colleagues from sister UN agencies and  
FAO,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to FAO Headquarters for this International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development. Thanks primarily to the generosity of Italy, but also to many other countries and to private donors, I believe that FAO can offer you one of the finest meeting facilities in the United Nations system for your Forum

It is now just over 18 months since the World Summit on Sustainable Development concluded its work in Johannesburg. One of FAO's objectives at that Summit was to draw increased attention to the important role played by agriculture in the fight against hunger. FAO's messages to the Summit emphasized the need to address the linkages between poverty, hunger and environmental degradation, and the key role of broad-based agricultural and rural development in alleviating these problems. We also stressed the importance of appropriate technologies based on sound ecosystem management to reduce food insecurity in a sustainable way. In particular, we highlighted in Johannesburg that strong political will and increased investment in agriculture and rural development, from both public and private sources, were essential to meeting the world's food needs, as well as to conserving, restoring and improving environmental, economic and social well-being. And we also stressed that political will was seldom possible without broad public support and that the mobilization of the financial resources required to overcome world hunger would not be possible without strong partnerships across a broad community of interests. Yes, partnerships – the subject of your meeting this week.

In addition to other important outcomes, the Johannesburg Summit set the stage for the launching of this innovative form of international cooperation.

Many partnerships were launched during the Summit process; FAO had a leading role in launching three of them. Over the next few days, you will be hearing more about these

partnership initiatives and about the progress they are making in reaching their goals and objectives. I shall, if I may, say just a few words about the three launched by FAO.

The first one, called the *SARD Initiative* covers sustainable agriculture and rural development. It is a Civil Society-driven, Government-supported and FAO-facilitated initiative. It offers a multistakeholder umbrella framework designed to support the transition to people-centred sustainable agriculture and rural development and to strengthen participation in programme and policy development. The Initiative supports pilot efforts to build the capacities of rural communities, disadvantaged groups and other stakeholders to improve access to biological, technological, land, water and energy resources and to markets and information. Organizations of farmers, indigenous people, workers and trade unions, women, youth, non-governmental organizations, the scientific and technological community, business and industry, interested consumer and media groups, along with Governments and Inter-Governmental Organizations are now tied into a network by this initiative.

The second partnership that we launched in Johannesburg was the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions, commonly known as the *Mountain Partnership*. This is an evolving alliance of countries, intergovernmental organizations and civil society groups that envisages the improved well-being, livelihoods and opportunities of mountain people and the protection and management of mountain environments around the world. The *Mountain Partnership* draws the wealth and diversity of resources, knowledge, information and expertise, from and through its members, in order to support concrete initiatives aimed at sustainable mountain development. By February this year, 40 countries, 15 intergovernmental organizations and 39 civil society groups had joined the Mountain Partnership.

The third partnership that I should like to mention is the *Education for Rural People Partnership*. This is one of the pillars of the International Alliance Against Hunger, which emerged from the *World Food Summit: five years later*. FAO and UNESCO have joined forces under this partnership to tackle the problem of illiteracy, which is recognized as being one of the causes of poverty in rural areas. The majority of the world's population is poor, and most of them, as well as the hungry, the undernourished, and the illiterate are rural. Through this partnership, those working in agriculture and education can harmonize their efforts to increase access to basic education and improve the quality of learning of the rural poor, especially girls and women.

I have mentioned the three partnerships that FAO launched in Johannesburg. Beyond these, we are of course intimately involved in a large number of other partnerships of many forms and with many types of partners that are directly relevant to our programmes in land, water, energy, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and rural development. We will be looking for opportunities to expand these partnerships, such as at the upcoming 12<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, particularly with regard to the sustainable use of water resources.

Finally, let me say simply that FAO believes in partnerships. Beyond the fact that our member states insist that we pursue them, partnerships make good business sense. We will never have sufficient financial or human resources to do all that we wish, so it is only logical that we aggressively seek the collaboration and assistance of others who share a common goal with us.

But partnerships do take time and energy. Once created, they do not operate on automatic pilot. They require patience, nurturing, understanding, giving, sharing, and a huge amount of communication. It is important, therefore, that all this special effort pay off and that it not only be process. Partnerships must yield products, progress, achievements, and substance. During your deliberations this week I encourage you to ensure that the partnership processes under way are on track to reaching their real substantive objectives.

To conclude, I should like to congratulate the Italian Ministry for the Environment and Territory and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs for organizing this very important Forum, and thank them for choosing FAO Headquarters as its venue. We hope that the Forum will make an important contribution to the achievement of the goals of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and those of the World Food Summit.

Thank you.