



**60th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
Statement during the General Debate of the Second Committee
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Mr. Chairman,

FAO welcomes the opportunity to participate in the general debate of this important Committee, and I wish to assure you and the members of the Committee of FAO's full support during the session.

It is opportune that the general debate of the Committee is taking place just after the recent historic Summit, where, despite not having attained all that was hoped for, there were important achievements, most particularly in the area of development. It is against this backdrop that I will share with the Committee information about FAO activities in support of the international development goals, especially those related to the eradication of hunger and poverty. I trust that this information will be useful during the deliberations of the Committee.

FAO welcomes the reference in the Summit Outcome of the need to place importance on the development of the rural and agriculture sectors in order to attain the MDGs and other development goals. The critical role of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in sustainable development has been understated for much too long and promoting increased investments in these sectors has been a major thrust of FAO's advocacy over the past decade.

Throughout the year, during the preparatory process for the Summit and the GA, the three Rome based food agencies (FAO, IFAD and WFP), sought to emphasize the inter linkages of all the MDGs and the need for coordinated action on several fronts. We drew attention to the close relationship between poverty and hunger (MDG1) and the need to reduce both, pointing out that while it is well understood that extreme poverty is at the root of chronic hunger, there is less recognition of hunger as an important cause of poverty. In order to achieve a strong and lasting impact on poverty, it must be understood how income, hunger reduction, education, health, gender, and environment interact. It is also necessary to "adequately fund actions and initiatives that reduce hunger through rural development and reduction of rural poverty, while at the same time strengthening direct access to food by the most vulnerable."

As stressed by the Director General of FAO in various fora, including ECOSOC and the Summit, "*It is unacceptable that 843 million people in developing and transition countries continue to be hungry and that more than 1 billion have to live on less than 1 dollar a day.*" Furthermore, "*There is no technical reason why anyone should not have enough to eat - yet one in seven humans is undernourished*". It must be recognized that "*... it is in everyone's interest to rid the world of hunger. For individuals who face hunger every day of their lives, we are literally dealing with a life or death issue. But the presence of widespread hunger also holds back the economic growth to which all nations aspire. As long as large numbers of people are hungry, the growth needed to reduce poverty will be out of reach. The rate at which hunger is being reduced is painfully slow, slower than what is required to meet the World Food Summit goal, especially in Africa.*"

It was heartening during the general debates of both the Summit and the General Assembly to hear World Leaders and Ministers speak about the importance of rural development, agriculture, fisheries and forestry, and, as we approach FAO's 60th Anniversary, there are encouraging signs that the downward trend in resources to these sectors are finally being arrested. World experts recently agreed on the *Beijing Consensus on the future of global agriculture and rural areas*, a significant step in recognizing the vital role of agriculture and rural communities in overall economic growth and sustainable development.

What then will be FAO's approach in the aftermath of the Summit, in the face of the rededication of the international community towards the eradication of hunger and poverty, and the attainment of other development goals? Discussions are underway about FAO moving quickly down the track of UN reform. "We have been looking at ourselves in the mirror over the past few months, seeing where we can shed weight and where we need to build up our strength". While noting that achievement of the development goals will be at the country level, "FAO needs to determine where and how its capacities should be most effectively deployed at this level in the context of the UN System's overall contribution to the process". The end result should be a "more unified FAO Secretariat, operating through a more coherent and decentralized structure, with a stronger sense of purpose and an enhanced capacity to implement strategies and achieve the objectives set by member states."

We will continue to bring to the early attention of the international community issues and situation that hold the potential to have adverse impact on endeavors to attain the development goals. In this context, and as brought to the attention of World Leaders during the Summit, I refer to the growing concern that we all share about the avian flu. Since it first became apparent on such a wide geographical scale in Southeast Asia in early 2004, the avian influenza crisis has had disastrous impact in several Southeast Asian countries. Nearly 140 million domestic poultry have either died or been destroyed. Economic losses to the Asian poultry sector are estimated at around US\$ 10 billion and livelihoods of millions of poor farmers are threatened. Few human cases have been reported but so far the avian influenza virus is not transmissible from humans to humans. With the disease now becoming endemic in some Asian countries like Viet Nam and

Indonesia and spreading to other regions such as Russia and Kazakhstan, the avian influenza virus could evolve and acquire this capacity which could initiate a human pandemic and thus significantly harm efforts made so far to achieve the MDGs. As recalled by Dr. Diouf during the World Summit, control of the disease at source in animals is therefore of the essence if we are to prevent a human pandemic.

Under the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases, FAO and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) in collaboration with WHO have developed a global strategy for the control of the avian influenza. Through its own Technical Cooperation Programme resources, FAO is providing support to affected countries to prevent and develop emergency plans to control the disease, establish regional networks on surveillance and circulate information. Some donors have started to contribute and several more initiatives are underway, but this should still be considered as a starting point and unless it translates into further financial funding to support the efforts at disease containment in affected countries, the cycle of bird flu infection that will occur in poultry this winter will not be stopped. Pandemic influenza preparedness and contingency planning is welcome by all member countries, but prevention - which is more cost effective - means tackling the infection in the veterinary-agriculture sector.

Later this session, the Committee will discuss the status of sustainable mountain development at the national, regional and international levels, and consider ways to promote sustainable development in mountain regions around the world. While assuring Member States of FAO's continued support for sustainable development in mountain regions, I remind representatives that International Mountain Day will be celebrated 11 December with the theme "**Sustainable Tourism for Poverty Alleviation in Mountain Areas**". The Day will be an occasion to heighten awareness about the perils and potentials of tourism in mountain areas and to appeal to a wide audience – governments and other partners – to promote sustainable livelihoods in mountain areas.

During the course of the session, I hope to share with Member States information about the conclusion of the International Year of Rice (IYR) and the continued importance that FAO will place on rice production. IYR brought together a wide range of partners and served to underscore the important role that rice, a staple food for more than half of the world's population, can play in providing food security, the eradication of hunger and poverty, and the attainment of other development goals.

Another opportunity to highlight the important role of agriculture and rural development will be the **International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development** to be held in Brazil in 2006. The Conference represents a critical element of FAO's programme to fulfil the commitments of the 1996 World Food Summit, the World Food Summit: *five years later*, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It should assist in mobilizing national governments and the international community to support ongoing agrarian reform and rural development processes, and in securing tenure rights and access to land and other natural resources by the poor.

Education is one of the most effective means of alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable development as it helps strengthen the capacity of people to solve their own problems and improve their lives and livelihood. FAO will continue to promote the importance of education in all areas of its work, giving particular emphasis to **Education for Rural People (ERP)**, a flag ship initiative being carried out in conjunction with UNESCO. The broad objectives of ERP are to increase access to, and the quality of, basic education for rural people, to foster national capacity to plan and implement rural education as part of National Education for All and Rural Development Plans, and to build awareness on the importance of rural education to achieve the MDGS, universal primary education and promote gender equity.

Gender and development will continue to be an important aspect of FAO's work. As outlined in FAO's strategic objectives for the Plan of Action for Women in Development, the advancement of women is central to achieving sustainable development. Women are responsible for natural resource management through their day-to-day productive and reproductive tasks of providing fuel, water and food for household consumption and for sale. They are often the major suppliers of household subsistence. When their access to productive resources declines, more people suffer from poverty and its related effects, including hunger, malnutrition and illness. Improving women's access to resources and services increases farm productivity, provides a more efficient use of resources, and ultimately yields higher profitability. Promoting development that is economically efficient, environmentally friendly and equitable requires a complete reorientation of development efforts to enhance women's capacities.

In this respect, once again it is critical to stress the importance the development dimensions of HIV/AIDS and that it not be viewed only as a health problem. The pandemic is shifting from cities to rural areas. In its earlier stages, the HIV/AIDS epidemic was predominantly an urban problem, affecting more men than women, and those with relatively higher incomes. Now the epidemic has rapidly moved into the rural areas, hitting those who are least equipped to deal with its consequences. Today, 95% of people living with - and dying of - HIV/AIDS are in developing countries. The overwhelming majority are the rural poor, and among them women figure disproportionately. It is undoing decades of economic and social development and causing rural disintegration. In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS is depleting the region of its food producers and farmers, decimating the agricultural labour force for generations to come. Effective solutions will have to take into account the agricultural sector - its capacity to reduce people's vulnerability to acquire the disease, the sector's role in both the prevention and mitigation of the consequences of HIV/AIDS and the people who depend on agriculture for their survival.

FAO will continue to treat as priority the particular needs of special groups of countries such as SIDs, LDCs and LLDCs. In this regard, I have sent to member states information about the special conference of SIDS Ministers of Agriculture, to be convened in November of this year during the 33rd Session of the FAO Conference. At the special conference, which will follow up the meeting held in Mauritius earlier this year, Ministers will examine vulnerability issues that affect food security and sustainable

development of SIDS. It will look at the agricultural sector's responses, including FAO's, to the strategies and mandates that have emerged concerning SIDS since the Earth Summit, taking into account issues such as the critical role of traditional commodities in SIDS economies, the impact of the changing international trade environment, especially in rural areas, the contribution of indigenous institutions in developing resilient food systems, and the role of South South cooperation.

With respect to South South Cooperation, I am pleased to report that as of 2005, under FAO's Special Programme for Food Security, there are currently more than 100 cooperating countries, approximately 30 of whom are operating or developing comprehensive National Food Security Programmes.

FAO participated closely with the UN System and other partners in the observance of the International Year of Microcredit, and we will continue with activities in the area of rural finance. Rural services include providing savings accounts, loans, insurance products or money transfers, with the aim of assisting organizations to build their capacity to improve rural financial services.

A crucial aspect of FAO's work will be its continued support to the Secretariat of NEPAD, particularly as it relates to the implementation of NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the companion document on the forestry, fisheries, and livestock sectors. The latter document was endorsed by the NEPAD Secretariat and the FAO Regional Conference for Africa in March 2004. The inclusion of livestock, fisheries and forestry into the CAADP raises the original total investment requirement from US\$251 to US\$320 billion, by 2015. With political will and the mobilization of external and internal finances, it is entirely possible for Africa's current agricultural situation to be changed.

This leads me to another point that FAO has stressed repeatedly. People in developing countries suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition because they lack water, other inputs and credit to produce food, employment and income to access food. Lack of political will and financial resources are today's main obstacles to resolving the world's hunger problem. Factors such as the availability of freshwater play a more important role for sustainable food production. Around 80 per cent of food crises are related in some way to water, and in particular to drought. Yet in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, only 4 per cent of the arable land is irrigated - using only 1.6 per cent of its available water resources - compared to 40 per cent in Asia. This defies all logic. FAO continues to stress the importance of having adequate investment in water control and infrastructure.

Critical to FAO's work will be the building of much stronger partnerships with institutions which share the same goals. In this context we see a need for more resources to be put into the International Alliance Against Hunger, which brings together FAO, other UN agencies concerned with hunger and poverty reduction, and a number of international NGOs. Likewise, FAO will continue to work closely with the other two Rome food agencies - IFAD and WFP. Our respective Heads have pledged to redouble

collaborative efforts to ensure the strongest possible support to promote agricultural and rural development and make a genuine difference in the lives of the hungry and poor throughout the developing world.

I have provided in brief details information on only some of the work that FAO is doing to support the development goals. Please be assured that I am ready to provide information to any delegation that would like to learn more about the activities to which I have referred, as well as any other information on FAO's work.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I refer again the celebration this year of the 60th Anniversary of the founding of FAO, as well as the 25th Observance of World Food Day. The theme selected for this year's World Food Day is "*Agriculture and Intercultural Dialogue*", chosen to highlight the historical contribution of all civilizations to food production. Attention will be focused on the role of science and technology in agriculture as well as the importance of religions and values towards a universal civilization for humanity. At FAO headquarters, WFD will be celebrated on Sunday, 16 October, at a major ceremony to which several high level personalities have been invited, and a separate 60th Anniversary special ceremony will be held on Monday, 17 October. Here at the United Nations I invite all delegations to view the WFD Exhibit which will be on display for two weeks in the Neck Area, 10 - 21 October.

Thank you Mr. Chairman