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STATEMENT

BY

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OPENING CEREMONY OF THE GRASSCUTTER REARING FORUM
Monday, 12 December 2005, at ILGS, Accra - Ghana

Distinguished Chairperson,
Hon. Minister of Food and Agriculture,
Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries of the Republic of Bénin,
Excellency, the Ambassador of Germany,
Excellencies, Representatives of International Organizations,
Regional and Central Directors,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a real pleasure for me to participate on behalf of FAO, at this important forum to which my Organization attaches great importance.

In Africa, wild animals have always significantly contributed to the protein needs of the population, especially in rural areas where bushmeat is reported to represent up to 75% of protein supply in most countries, especially in the West Moist Africa.

Over the last decade the demand for this commodity has in many countries exceeded the capacity of the wildlife resources to sustainably cope with at the level of exploitation. This

situation has led Governments to adopt policies and regulatory frameworks guiding the utilization and trade in bushmeat. In February of this year, FAO co-organized a West-African bushmeat conference where an action plan for the region was drafted to assist countries to tackle the bushmeat crisis.

However, the demand for bushmeat remains. Sometimes, bushmeat is seen as a delicacy, at other times it is the only source of animal protein available. It is therefore important to develop alternatives to the exploitation of wild animals for bushmeat. The rearing of wildlife species on farms does not only provide such an alternative to bushmeat, it also diversifies the income base in rural areas and increases food security for the poor, linking the activity directly to the Millennium Development Goal number one (Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger).

FAO has given assistance to numerous countries worldwide to improve animal production systems. In the Sahelian countries, projects have been initiated to rear wild bird species such as the Guinea Fowl and Arabian Bustard as well as small antelopes.

In the early eighties, FAO started supporting grasscutter rearing activities in West Africa. Currently, in Ghana, there are many initiatives under FAO's 'Telefood' programme, such as the one for the Students of the School for the Deaf in Cape Coast and for Women grasscutter production associations in Bongo, Tolon, Yendi and Tumu. These animal rearing projects are important emerging opportunities for rural people.

It is encouraging to note that grasscutter rearing is growing from a small-scale hobby for some people into a large industry for many and to see all the people gathered here today to discuss problems, opportunities and potential for the grasscutter rearing business. Indeed grasscutter rearing is a growing activity for improving rural livelihoods.

I was informed that this forum will pull all the information on grasscutter which is available in the sub-region. The proceedings of the forum will greatly enhance not only the understanding we have about the business of grasscutter, but also the problems which need to be resolved. FAO is prepared to assist member countries to address the problems and make grasscutter rearing a successful agricultural business enterprise in West-Africa.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations.