



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU

**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, LIVESTOCK
FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND BIOSECURITY**

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GOUVERNEMENT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE DE VANUATU

**MINISTÈRE DE L'AGRICULTURE, DE L'ÉLEVAGE,
DE LA SYLVICULTURE, DES PÊCHES ET DE LA BIOSÉCURITÉ**

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HONOURABLE MINISTER'S OFFICE

FAO MINISTERS MEETING OPENING STATEMENT

HONOURABLE MINISTER WILLIE DANIEL KALO

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to extend to you all a very warm greeting on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Vanuatu.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate Dr Qu Dongyu in his new role as the new FAO Director General. The Government of the Republic of Vanuatu looks forward to strengthening partnerships and collaborations with you.

Mr. Chairman, the world we live today is full of unpredicted challenges and opportunities. What we consider normal no longer makes sense amid the complexities of COVID-19. The challenges of COVID-19 are impacting and changing the existence of our societies and communities, and forcing us to reconsider our national investments and development priorities.

For Small Island States like Vanuatu, the challenges of COVID-19 are exacerbated by climate change and natural disasters which are projected to have significant impacts, including rising sea-levels, more violent tropical cyclones and droughts. Fish stocks are expected to be directly affected by any changes that may occur in the ocean's ecosystem. Warming waters

would harm coral reefs and vital fish habitats. Changes in temperature and rainfall would also impact the farming industry due to an increased risk of infestation by pests and diseases in many staple and export crops.

In order to deal with the threats of COVID-19, climate change and natural disasters, profound changes must be applied to our food system.

This year marks 40 years of independence by the Republic of Vanuatu. The pathway we traversed to get to where we are today has not been easy and it will get harder and harder as we traverse the development pathway for the next 40 years to achieve our national aspirations.

As our population increases, our land space for cultivation of agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fisheries products to feed our people will get smaller. Food security demand by our increasing population will outstrip the ability of several of our rural communities to supply food. The negative effect being the unfortunate shift towards dependency on imported processed food that are energy-dense and nutritionally poor. As a result, the incidence of obesity and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, will continue to increase. Moreover, increasing reliance on imported foods will make us particularly vulnerable to variation in supply and cost. Therefore our endeavour to set up development frameworks conducive to “Building a stable, sustainable and prosperous nation” will slowly drifts away into oblivion.

The need to strengthen our food systems to maintain our food supply is eminent for the sustainability of our societies. We must look beyond the challenges we see and face today and develop innovative alternative measures to increase food production to meet anticipated food supply shortfalls of tomorrow.

In addressing this issue, the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu recognizes the important contribution of productive sectors and role of rural communities through farming and fishing by bringing into perspective community-based mechanised farming approaches to address a shortfall in the supply of local food produce to sustain the well-being and food security of our rural communities.

The Government of Vanuatu is investing large portions of national funds on development of its productive sectors, which include, agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries, and biosecurity. Our people are at the very heart of our development aspirations. At this critical time, the government of the Republic of Vanuatu will continue to look to FAO for technical support and funding assistance.

At this time of extreme crises, I call on FAO to pay special attention to vulnerable Pacific small island states like the Republic of Vanuatu and to work with us to develop alternative and innovative farming and fishing systems to sustain our food security and livelihoods. We must be ready to take advantage of any favourable impacts that may arise from climate change. More resilient food systems will have to be created, but more research is needed before development adaptations can be applied effectively.

Together we must strive to ensure that our nations are stable, sustainable and prosperous, so that all people have a just and equal opportunity to be well educated, healthy and wealthy. Just as we strive to progress in a way that protects and preserves our natural resources for our children, and theirs.

We must utilise the challenges of today as key drivers for development opportunities of tomorrow.

I thank you Mr. chairman.

