

THE CONFERENCE OF FOOD & AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION

Thirty-ninth Session

6-13 June, 2015

Statement in the Plenary by

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and

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Thirty-ninth Session of the FAO Conference

Bismillahi Al-Rahman Al-Rahim

Mr. Chairperson of the Conference, Mr. Director-General, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honour for me to speak on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the Theme of the Conference (which is): **Breaking the Cycle of Rural Poverty and Hunger by Strengthening Rural Resilience: Social Protection and Sustainable Agricultural Development**". The theme is highly relevant to the situation in my country which is recovering from natural and man - made disasters of several decades.

Although food security and nutrition in Afghanistan has witnessed improvements in recent years, still 30 percent of our population of 25 million do not have access to sufficient calorie and protein intake and micro-nutrient deficiency is high among children. Also droughts, floods, recurrent plant and animal diseases, high food losses, price volatility and underdeveloped rural markets have kept our fragmented national food -chain system under severe pressure.

Chairperson! It needs to be emphasized that building the resilience of rural population is a lengthy and complex process, multi-dimensional and also context-specific. Hence, it requires careful planning and specific policy developments to achieve this highly desirable goal. This is particularly true in the case of low-income countries, often subjected to protracted crises of one form or another.

While the recipe for resilience building differs from country to country, one common feature among them is crystal clear "it is the capacity of the sector to respond positively and quickly when and

where appropriate policies for resilience strengthening are designed and implemented by the state in partnership with all stakeholders. Partnership and collaborative work is essential for a successful agricultural policy.

In this respect, up-scaling of agriculture and improving its performance is of highest national priority for the Government of Afghanistan. One of the main objectives of our National Development Strategy is to strengthen the productive capacity of farmers and herders to be able to produce adequate supply of diversified nutrient-rich food for our population, with special attention given to improving the diet of the vulnerable segment of the population, especially children under 5 years of age.

In the context of Afghanistan, where 75 percent of the population lives in rural areas, the Government of Afghanistan has adopted the following policies aiming at strengthening rural resilience through national solidarity and pragmatic governance.

- **One**, and the most important step, is to make sustainable agriculture as a major pillar of national economic development; to increase the level of investment in agriculture and the rural sector and to enhance the linkage between agriculture and other sectors of the national economy;
- **Two**, to improve the sectoral governance and the rural economy through appropriate laws and regulations regarding the use of land and water resources; provision of rural finance; access to markets; the provision of essential public goods and services to rural people; promoting gender equality and generating employment opportunities for women and men in rural areas;
- **Three**, taking realistic measures to mitigate climate shocks, with special emphasis on soil-enhancing techniques, water harvesting, stopping desertification and promoting the forestation of eroded river basins;
- **Four**, strengthening the link between crops and livestock production systems, especially by expanding the area under fodder crops and improving the productivity of grazing land;
- **Five**, increasing the efficiency of irrigation and creating additional water storage facilities to enable the expansion of area under irrigation during the hot Summer months;
- **Six**, accelerating the spread of improved varieties of all crops, greater use of organic fertilizer and more reliance on integrated pest management;

- **Seven**, upgrading animal health and husbandry and developing a robust animal feed industry based on locally produced material;
- **Eight**, improving access to clean and affordable energy in rural areas that will strengthen the food chain system and facilitate the growth of small and medium-size enterprises in rural areas, especially cold storage;
- **Nine**, make sure that our vulnerable urban and rural population and communities located in remote areas have access to an adequate level of food consumption through public food distribution and solidarity mechanisms;
- **Ten**, to further strengthen our cooperative system as a major leverage for promoting sustainable agriculture, promoting equity in rural areas, building resilience and expanding links with the market in the urban centers for the benefit of all producers. Strong Farmer's organizations are essential to achieve both solidarity and global food security.

We are making gradual progress in each of the ten areas, but more needs to be done to develop the full potential of Afghan agriculture to meet the food and non-food requirements of our rapidly growing population, satisfying the demand and of our emerging agro-industry as well as fulfilling the export potential of Afghanistan in horticulture and livestock products.

This highlights the importance to develop the full potential of family farming, in particular its multifunctional character. Family farming is inextricably linked to national and global food security, both in developed and developing countries. In Afghanistan, family farming is and will remain the predominant form of agriculture and in the food production sector.

Chairperson! the progress made so far has been the result of the continuous and generous support from multilateral and bilateral partners, including the support received from FAO.

While we remain committed to pursue vigorously our goals of creating a sustainable food system and building rural resilience, the Government of Afghanistan will continue to seek outside technical and financial assistance to supplement our national efforts and in this respect we look forward for further strengthening our partnership with the Rome-based agencies as well as making greater use of South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

Thank you Chairperson, Mr. Director-General, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen for listening to my statement.