

THE CONFERENCE OF FOOD AND
AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION

Thirty-eighth Session

15-22 June, 2013

Statement in the Plenary by

H.E. Dr. Zia Nezam

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to
Italy

And

Alternate Head of the Delegation of Afghanistan to
the
Thirty-eighth Session of the FAO Conference

Bismillahi Al-Rahman Al-Rahim

Mr. Chairperson of the Conference,

Mr. Director-General,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on “ Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition”, which is the theme of the Conference.

Over the past five years the collective impact of food price volatility, global financial difficulties and climatic shocks have had adverse effects on food and nutrition security in all countries, especially in the net food-importing developing countries. Therefore the theme selected for the Thirty-eighth Conference is opportune and well-timed.

Although household food security in Afghanistan has generally improved in recent years, about 30 percent of the population still continues to suffer from food and nutrition insecurity in three aspects: insufficient calorie intake, low protein intake and inadequate diversity in diet. Droughts, floods, recurrent plant and animal diseases, pre-harvest and post-harvest losses, price volatility and underdeveloped market infrastructure have kept our fragile food system under severe pressure.

We regard sustainable food system as the process by which food items travel from the producer to the household for consumption, and involves sustainable production, sustainable marketing and trade, and sustainable consumption. It is estimated that 30 percent of our annual cereal production and up to 50 percent of vegetable and fruit production are lost to attacks from birds, pests, rodent and fungi; as well as mishandling of food at wholesale and retail level. The system of transfer is very much influenced by the type of food items locally produced and the consumption habits of the local population. Food waste at household level is minimal.

Overall, food production in Afghanistan is territorially dispersed. In each of our 364 districts, the household needs get priority before food items are released to the national food system. It is estimated that probably no more than 23 percent of our annual food production enters the organized national food market.

As spelled out in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, our national objective is to strengthen the productive capacity of our people so that they can have access to nutrient-rich food commensurate with their purchasing power. Special attention is given to improving the diet of the vulnerable segment of the population, especially children under 5 years of age.

In the realization of national food and nutrition security, Afghanistan faces six major challenges.

- One, to increase the nutrient content of locally produced food through diversification of crop and animal products;
- Two, to reduce pre-harvest and post-harvest losses and cut down on the loss of animals through disease control;
- Three, to augment through storage and better access roads the food supply to remote mountain regions during the lean winter months and early Spring;
- Four, to maintain adequate food supply of safe quality to our rapidly growing urban centers; at present about 25 percent of our population live in cities;
- Five, to ensure that our vulnerable population has access to an adequate level of food consumption through publicly administered food distribution systems;
- Six, to ensure that imported fresh and processed food is safe and meet the preference of our people.

While we face constraints in our food system, there are windows of opportunities for making the food system work better and I wish to highlight some of these opportunities.

We are making gradual progress in reducing pre-harvest losses through control of locust infestation and other pests and saving more animals by proper treatment of diseases. Similar progress is being made in reducing post-harvest losses, for example by providing households with metallic silos that protects cereals from pests and allows for long period storage with no loss of quality.

The diversity of food production in Afghanistan, especially fruits, offers profitable opportunities for supply of domestic consumption as well as exports. Most promising is the processing for exports of raisins, apricot and almonds and lately also saffron. The role of women producer associations in these post-harvest value addition and quality control is prominent. All these activities are gender friendly.

Another area for making rapid progress is the development of Dairy Cooperatives for providing fresh milk to urban population and the production of yogurt and cheese through village processing centers.

Because of its dry climate and plenty of sun Afghanistan has high potential for solar-powered greenhouse-grown vegetable and flowers, both to meet the off-season needs of our population and that of exports.

Our growing cooperative system provides ample opportunities for a viable and sustainable business-oriented food system that can grow and flourish

on its own initiatives, with public sector providing support in the form of infrastructure and technical services.

The achievements made so far have been as a result of continued and generous support of our international partners and particularly the FAO.

While we remain committed to pursue our goals in creating sustainable food systems and improving food security and nutrition in Afghanistan, we will work to equally strengthen for achieving the mentioned goals on the regional and international level.

Thank you Chairperson.