

Statement by Dr. Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Honourable Food Minister of Bangladesh

Mr. Chairperson of the Conference
Mr. Jose Graziano Da Silva, Director General of FAO
H.E the Ministers, Ambassadors
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning,

It is my great honour and pleasure to attend the 38th Session of the FAO Conference. On behalf of Government of Bangladesh and its people I congratulate Mr. Mohammad Asif Rahimi, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock of Afghanistan for his election as the Chairperson of the Conference. I also congratulate other Vice Chairpersons and thank the Chairperson of the last Conference Mr. Tefera for his contributions.

Mr. Chairperson,

Since its establishment in 1945, FAO has been engaged in eradicating hunger, malnutrition and rural poverty. Addressing this concern requires adequate food to be produced, which in turns entails the development and adoption of a continuous flow of sustainable technologies and the inclusive engagement of small holders. Equally essential is to ensure access of all the population to adequate, safe and nutritious food as needed for leading an active and healthy life. Access has to come from increased income generating opportunities and from social protection interventions to be able to ensure the right to food for those unable to obtain adequate access through the market or homestead production. Last but not the least, the safety and quality of the food needs to be ensured from farm to table and the absorption of food needs to be supported by adequate nutrition interventions to be able to ensure optimal utilization. I would like to commend FAO for its innovative and forward-looking approaches and take this occasion to reiterate my Government's appreciation for FAO as a trusted partner in the fight against hunger and rural poverty.

Mr. Chairperson,

Allow me in this occasion to thank FAO in particular for awarding Bangladesh a diploma in recognition of our "notable and outstanding progress in fighting hunger". We feel honoured for this recognition. As estimated by FAO, we achieved the UN Millennium Development Goal-1 for hunger as the prevalence of undernourishment reduced from 34.6% in 1990-92, to 16.8% in 2010-2012. Moreover, the number of undernourished people in Bangladesh reduced from 37.2 million in 1990-92 to 25.3 million in 2010-12 despite the rapid population growth. My dear friends and colleagues, this was not an easy task for a small and densely

populated country where 160 million people live on 55 thousand square miles and are confronted with natural calamities that are becoming more frequent and severe as a result of climate change.

I must affirm that this achievement has been possible due to the able leadership of our Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, who led the cohesive work of the Ministries of Food, Agriculture, Fishery and Livestock and many others in line with the **Vision-2021** adopted by our Government with the ambitious objective of reaching middle income status within 50 years from independence.

Mr. Chairperson,

You all know that poverty eradication requires rural and agricultural development. In Bangladesh, the agriculture sector still plays an important role in the economy. Half of the population is employed in agriculture and two thirds live in rural areas. Agriculture is the main domestic source of demand and growth for the entire economy. The policy of the Government, under leadership of the Hon'ble PM Sheikh Hasina, recognises primary attention to this sector and this has increased our resilience to the global financial crises. We enhanced agricultural research and extension, expanded irrigated areas, improved the distribution of seeds and fertilizer, increased and rebalanced fertilizer subsidies, promoted mechanization and adoption of sustainable and environmentally friendly agricultural practices, encouraged the modernization of food distribution and increased grain storage capacity and the participation in the market of small and marginal farmers also by improved access to financial services in collaboration with our NGOs. It is noteworthy to mention that agricultural research has led to the development of saline and drought resistant varieties of paddy, and different genomes of jute. Production of rice, our main food staple, is now exceeding 34 Million Metric tons per year. This is more than 3 times the level recorded at the time of independence and almost 10 million metric tons more than just 10 years ago. We recognise the primary merit for these achievements to our farmers, their hard work and their resilience to natural calamities. We valorised their abilities and determination through a policy framework based on macroeconomic, financial inclusiveness, and comprehensive coverage of food and nutrition interventions. Under our National Food Policy and Country Investment Plan (CIP); intensification, diversification through increased production of micro-nutrient and protein rich food sources, sustainability and resilience of agriculture are coupled with targeted social protection interventions mostly targeted towards women empowerment through generation of employment opportunities, promotion of access to food for the poor and nutrition interventions aiming at eradicating child and maternal undernutrition. We acknowledge that the long lasting collaboration with FAO has been instrumental in putting in place this effective policy framework and in maximizing international financing. In the 2 years since the approval of the Country Investment Plan, we were able to mobilize additional 3.3 billion US\$ for investing in agriculture, food security and nutrition. More than one third was provided by the international community.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are very happy to learn that Mr. Wilfred of Tanzania is going to be elected as the Independent Chairperson of Council (ICC). We welcome him as we thank Mr. Luc of France for the successful completion of his term. We are very happy to learn that in this Conference, the Reviewed Strategic Framework and the Medium Term Plan (MTP) have been placed for approval. We acknowledge that the MTP has been developed through a strategic thinking process and describes the result based model and its strategic objectives, functional objectives and core functions. The 5 strategic objectives identified are fully in line with our expectations. It is praiseworthy to note that the first objective is the realization of eradication of hunger. We hope that Bangladesh's successful experience in managing policy and investment planning, based on a governance inclusive of civil society, private sector and international development partners can inspire FAO in pursuing this strategic objective worldwide.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are happy to see FAO committed to partnering with civil society and private sector organizations. We are convinced that eradication of rural poverty requires the mobilization of all possible energies within each country and reinforced international collaboration. Bangladesh has high regards for its NGOs and CSOs, which are among the largest in the world and are now rapidly extending their presence internationally. Providing resources and opportunities to women has positive impact on children's health and education, and long term economic development, and hence the government aims to further enhance women's productivity in agriculture and rural non-farm economy. We also welcome reinforced partnership among the international organizations we belong to. The technical and financial resources of the three Rome-based UN agencies - IFAD, FAO and WFP - can be further valorised by reinforce partnership at country level. Meanwhile, we encourage the DG of FAO in continuing his effort to make FAO a more effective, knowledge-based organization.

Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, I must say that as a most densely populated country, highly vulnerable to climate change, Bangladesh is facing a formidable challenge in its fight against hunger. We have no room for complacency for achieving the MDG-1 target and we shall have to go a long way for ensuring access to safe and nutritious food for all of our people, at all times. We expect that FAO will continuously be with us in the long journey ahead of us toward the progressive realization of Right to Food. I welcome the decisions of the Conference and look forward to see their successful implementation.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson and thank you all for patient hearing.