

**Speech by His Excellency Eng. Walid Assaf  
Minister of Agriculture of the State of Palestine  
at the Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations Conference**

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**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Please let me first express my thanks and appreciation to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and its Director-General Mr. **José Graziano da Silva** on the continued support of agriculture and farmers in the State of Palestine that mitigates the severe circumstances and challenges faced by Palestinian farmers, especially the small ones. I would also like to thank all the friendly countries, which have been funding FAO activities and projects in Palestine. Also please let me take this opportunity to extend my appreciation to you, and through you to your people and your states for the support and assistance that you have provided to the Palestinian People through voting for Palestine as an observer member in the United Nations, hoping that the countries that did not vote for the resolution, and which most of them have good relations with Palestine, will reconsider their positions, as this constitutes a direct contribution to the achievement of peace and justice in the region and the world at large.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

An estimated 860 million people still suffer from hunger and chronic undernourishment in the world, which calls for achieving sustainable growth of agricultural productivity to help eliminate hunger and ensure a more efficient use of natural resources. The importance of agriculture as the way to achieve food security continues to increase, especially in light of the global challenges posed by the economic and financial crisis and its negative effects, as well as the climate change, drought, global warming, degradation of agricultural land and aquatic systems, weak agricultural productivity, especially grain production, risk of pests and diseases of animal and plant cross-border, inefficiency of risk management with regard to natural disasters, especially drought, as well as the weak capacity to reduce food losses and waste.

In addition to the global challenges that overshadow the Palestinian agriculture, the Israeli occupation with its settlement activity and arbitrary measures are considered the most important challenges and obstacles facing the agriculture and food security in Palestine. For example, the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip isolates more than 15% of the agricultural lands under security pretexts. In addition, more than 60% of the West Bank territory (Area C) is still under the full control of the Israeli occupation, which prevents the exploitation of these lands. Moreover, the establishment of the apartheid wall has destroyed 75 thousand dunams of agricultural land and isolated more than 700 thousand dunams, of which 150 thousand dunams are agricultural fertile lands, not to mention the occupation's control of more than 82% of the Palestinian water resources, and 85% of the of the natural rangelands territory. All this causes a significant increase in the rates of unemployment and poverty, forcing 27% of the Palestinians to become food insecure.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We have reviewed with great interest FAO's strategic framework 2010-2019 and its five strategic objectives, especially the fifth one which has to do with increasing the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises. In this context, we would like to appeal to you from this international rostrum, to give special attention to the countries that suffer from chronic threats, especially our state of Palestine whose people has been under occupation for more than 50 years.

Despite the huge distortions and obstacles that we suffer from as a result of the Israeli occupation and its negative effects on Palestinian agriculture and farmers, we have succeeded over the previous years to provide the foundations and fundamentals for modern agriculture, taking into account that the farmer is the means and the target for agricultural development, while the role of the state is concentrated on providing the appropriate environment to bring about growth and attract investment. Here, we once again would like to express our appreciation and gratitude for the brotherly and friendly countries that funded and supported agricultural projects in Palestine, in addition to the great attention of the Palestinian government, which has allocated 7% of its development budget for agriculture over the years 2011-2013.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**The Palestinian agricultural sector has witnessed** remarkable growth over the past few years, **particularly in the following areas:**

1. Production of high quality and value export goods that are highly competitive in domestic and overseas markets. This maximizes the return on the scarce water used.
2. Improving the management of agricultural natural resources, especially land and water.
3. Continuing to implement the national Greening of Palestine program through the cultivation of fruit, forest and pastoral seedlings.
4. Providing legal environment to promote and encourage investment in agriculture, through the preparation and updating of agricultural laws and regulations, especially with regard to the quality and safety of food.
5. Strengthening the institutional capacities in order to improve the level of Agriculture research, extension and sanitary and phytosanitary services.
6. Strengthening cooperation and partnership with the NGOs and private sectors, and distributing the roles within a clear framework of partnership, transparency and distribution of tasks.

The attraction of more local and foreign investment to the agricultural sector in Palestine necessarily requires the removal of all obstacles and distortions related to occupation, through the Israeli withdrawal from all the 1967 occupied territories, in addition to providing the necessary infrastructure, particularly for marketing, export, supporting farmers' associations, especially small-scaled farmers, and providing systems for financing, insurance and tackling disasters.

**At the end, I hope that the Palestinian Minister of Agriculture will attend the next FAO Conference with the State of Palestine has already become a full member and an active contributor to achieving the goals of your esteemed organization.**

*Thank you very much*