



Statement

by

**Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya
Under-Secretary-General
High Representative
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked
Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States**

General Debate

Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen

I wish to express my sincere thanks for the opportunity to make a statement at the General Debate of the 38th Session of the FAO Conference. I wish to express my appreciation to the Director-General, Mr. Graziano da Silva, for his excellent report. I also thank him for co-organizing a side event in collaboration with IFAD and WFP on food security, sustainable agriculture development and structural transformation in LDCs, which was held yesterday.

Nowhere the echoes of food security, nutrition and rural development resonate more than in vulnerable countries, in particular the least developed countries. Indeed, despite continued decline in prevalence rates of undernourishment in these countries, it is estimated that 260 million people are still living with hunger in LDCs. Also, the share of the hungry people in relation to the total population is highest in LDCs. According to the most recent FAO's Crop Prospects and Food Situation, of the 36

countries requiring external assistance for food, 27 are LDCs, and most of these countries are located in Africa.

Vulnerable countries are also where the broader economic and social implications of food insecurity are most conspicuous. Food insecurity across these countries is caused in part by limited supply of food, which itself reflects low agricultural productivity and output and, in short, slow structural transformation. Another important issue, of course, is access to food by all.

As more than 70 per cent of the population of LDCs lives in rural areas, where agriculture is the main source of income and employment, the performance of the agriculture sector is central to the lives of most people living in LDCs. Such performance also affects other economic sectors either directly through the marketing of agricultural inputs and outputs or indirectly through the provision of other services in rural markets. Therefore, there is a great opportunity before us.

Productivity in the agricultural sector has not increased much over the last three decades. Productivity stands at less than 20 per cent of that of the middle-income countries. Also, the reality in most LDCs is not only a lack of significant productivity growth but also inadequate labour absorption outside of agriculture.

The double challenge before many LDCs is therefore one of boosting productivity in the agricultural and rural economy while diversifying into higher value goods outside agriculture.

These issues were at the centre of discussions at yesterday's side event. The communiqué issued at this event underscored that addressing this double challenge holds the key to achieving structural transformation, strong growth, sustainable and inclusive development, and food and nutrition security.

This, in turn, will require reversing the chronic under-capitalisation of agriculture, promoting sustainable agricultural production systems and practices, boosting funding for agricultural research and technology, improving marketing and rural infrastructure and addressing the education and skill gaps, particularly in rural areas.

Among the measures proposed by participants at yesterday's side event was the growing adoption of social protection schemes, including cash-based transfers, school feeding programmes and emergency food reserves, as ways to secure access to food by vulnerable groups.

Together with a stronger national leadership, the need for strengthening and scaling up global support for LDCs in this particular sector was stressed. Besides enhanced support from the traditional development partners, there was a recognition of the growing importance of South-South cooperation in agriculture, and call for increased experience-sharing and peer-learning and technical cooperation between emerging countries and LDCs, including through triangular cooperation.

This year's *FAO State of Food and Agriculture report* clearly shows that addressing hunger and malnutrition requires more than greater availability of food and vibrant

agriculture sector but also adequate food systems, which enable people to have the right mix of nutritious foods and the required knowledge and information for healthy choices.

Excellencies,

It is encouraging that much is now being done, as various bilateral, regional and international organisations are teaming up or operating on their own to deliver operational and technical support as well as policy advice to vulnerable countries, including LDCs. Therefore, a better targeted, comprehensive and coherent support to LDCs should be high on the agenda.

This will help build a stronger consistency in support of vulnerable countries like LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS among existing global and regional governing bodies and coordination mechanisms dealing with food security issues. The operationalization of UN Secretary-General's Zero Hunger Challenge initiative will be an important yardstick against which progress will be measured.

It is equally important that dimensions of food security, agriculture development and structural transformation —as they relate to LDCs—feature in the discussions and outcomes of the negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals, climate change and other relevant issues.

Working together with all, LDCs' inter-agency group on agriculture, food security and rural development will pursue this agenda in the context of the UN's work of the post-2015 development agenda and other related processes.

Thank you for your kind attention.