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SPEECH BY H.E. PAUL KAGAME,

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA, WORLD FOOD DAY

Rome October 15th, 2010

- ✚ Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director General of FAO;**
- ✚ Honourable Vincenzo Scotti, Under-Secretary of State,
Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs;**
- ✚ Dr. Kanayo Nwanze, President of IFAD;**
- ✚ Ms. Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of WFP;**
- ✚ Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:**

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you, and I wish to thank the organisers of this ceremony for their gracious invitation.

In my country, Rwanda, the call to unite against hunger, which is the theme of this year's World Food Day, is close to our heart, so we appreciate this opportunity to share ideas on how to realise our collective goal that every single person must have sufficient and sustainable access to food.

In this day and age, with prosperity all around us, and with unprecedented advances in science and agricultural technology, we should not accept that countless numbers of people continue to die of hunger and related diseases.

So, this begs the question: what is the missing link? Why are we here today still talking about hunger when we all understand that hunger kills and deprives people of their dignity and a decent way of living?

↓ Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

I wish to propose a way forward, based on the experiences we in developing countries have had.

First of all, the political will and the pledge to eradicate hunger must be real. Leaders need to collectively deliver on commitments they have made in various fora. We have a responsibility to millions of people and history will judge us harshly if we allow this to become another empty promise.

Secondly, there is no doubt that more financial and other resources need to be invested in agriculture. Over the last thirty years, public sector investments in agriculture have diminished significantly due to the misguided assumption that

the private sector would take on these responsibilities. I am happy to note that at this stage we all agree on the reversal of this approach, but we also need to agree with the need to come through on the required financing.

Financial resources have sometimes been channelled through food aid, which has proved very useful in emergency situations and carries countries through times of crisis.

However, in some places food aid has created distortions in local markets, and become a disincentive to local food production and self-sufficiency.

Thirdly, food security is essentially - and must be seen by all - as a national issue. Programmes for food sufficiency and security - from policy and strategy formulation to project design and implementation - must be country-initiated and country-driven.

Cooperation with partners can then be on the basis of what has been identified and developed as national goals and priorities. This has been the case in a number of countries, where we believe that food-security is slowly becoming a reality for most farmers.

However, we have also seen the dangers of bypassing government systems, and in so-doing, scattering or even compromising national efforts to address hunger and hunger-related issues.

The fourth point I wish to raise is that becoming self-sufficient in food production cannot be separated from good governance. In most developing countries, it remains the responsibility of government to create the right climate for farmers, especially smallholder farmers and allied agro-businesses. It is these farmers, not governments who actually produce and must therefore be involved in finding solutions for food security.

Of course, this presupposes educating and empowering them, particularly women who produce the bulk of the food consumed in developing countries, yet have limited access to basic means of production. In Rwanda, we view women's empowerment not only as a constitutional right, but as an opportunity for them to become active change agents in our national development process. This is why we have laws and policies to ensure that this transformation takes place.

Fifth, while we all recognise the role of inputs such as seeds and fertilisers, access remains a challenge to the farmers who need them the most. To counter this, we must invest more in research and technological development, and put in place the proper conditions to make agricultural inputs more affordable for the average farmer.

Despite all our efforts, agricultural yields are likely to be increasingly affected by climate change. We must, therefore, improve early warning systems by investing in our meteorological capabilities, and enhancing cooperation with those who have more advanced forecasting technology.

Lastly, we should recognise that over 60% of agricultural land in developing countries is not tenured. To increase agricultural yields, investment in land tenure and appropriate land management systems is key.

Equally crucial is investment in infrastructure such as roads, markets, irrigation, and storage systems. We need to address the issue of post-harvest losses, which are currently unacceptably high. We also should secure markets for their produce as the only sure way to motivate farmers and sustain food production.

↓ Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Ultimately, sustainable food security will be attained within the overall framework of poverty eradication. For farmers, this should mean that they are able to feed themselves and their families, but also convert food into cash to meet any other needs.

In conclusion, let me say that we all appreciate the urgency of finding solutions to global hunger – this is a problem that we have to, and can, solve together.

Let me acknowledge the role of the Food and Agriculture Organisation as a supporter of country-led agricultural initiatives and a strong advocate for food security. I also appreciate the work done by IFAD, WFP and other agencies based here in Rome to coordinate and support food security initiatives, sometimes in very difficult circumstances.

I wish you all a productive World Food Day, and I thank you for your kind attention.