

*Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the
Small Island Developing States*

*Statement by
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23 November 2005 – FAO Headquarters, Rome

*Mr Chairman,
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to welcome you all to this Special Heads of States Meeting on Agriculture in Small Island Developing States.

Economic, socio-cultural and environmental vulnerability of SIDS has been acknowledged in all the major conferences and summits that have taken place since the 1994 *Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Islands Developing States*, including the *World Food Summit* held in 1996, the *Millennium Summit* of 2000, the *International Meeting on the Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for Sustainable Development in SIDS*, which was held in Mauritius, in January 2005, and recently the *World Summit* of the UNGA 2005.

All these events recognized the key role of agriculture and rural development policies to achieve a sustainable and equitable development of these economies and especially poverty and hunger reduction.

Nine years after the *World Food Summit* (WFS) and five years from the *Millennium Summit*, the progress made towards the achievement of WFS objectives and MDGs in Small Islands Developing States is slow. Almost 20 percent of the total population of SIDS remains under-nourished and 37 percent under poverty.

More needs to be done to achieve 2015 goals. Addressing economic, social and environmental challenges affecting agriculture is a prerequisite to achieving food security, poverty reduction and sustainable development goals. Agriculture accounts for 15 percent of the GDP of SIDS, with the poorest countries recording the highest shares. Moreover, more than 44 percent of the population lives in the rural areas; and almost one-third of the active population is employed in the primary sector. In addition, 60 percent of the SIDS countries depend on the agriculture sector for more than 15 percent of their total exports, and yet SIDS countries are very minor players in global agricultural markets. As a group, SIDS account for only one percent of global agricultural exports, down from 5 percent in the early 1970s.

Strategies aiming at fighting food insecurity must therefore recognize the role of agriculture. The implementation of these strategies requires primarily the political will of the States through adequate allocation of funding to agriculture, fisheries and forestry in the national budgets, then supplemented with development assistance. Sadly, in some cases,

allocations to the agricultural sector have fallen below one percent of the total budget in these countries. ODA has also been falling; the overall disbursement of international assistance to SIDS decreased from US\$2.9 billion in 1994 to US\$1.7 billion in 2002. These trends must be reversed.

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All FAO's support to SIDS countries contributes, directly or indirectly, to hunger reduction and strengthening the resilience of the primary sector to adverse economic and natural environment through exploiting the development opportunities.

The Regional Programmes for Food Security (RPFS) launched in 2002 in the Caribbean and the Pacific are instrumental to achieving these objectives through actions geared to support national development programmes, remove economic constraints at regional level and promote the development of trade opportunities at international level. Through the Regional Programmes for Food Security, member countries also collaborate on issues related to water resources, transboundary diseases and environmental management. The Regional Special Programme for Food Security for the Caribbean is to be scaled up from presently US\$11 million to US\$120 million within 5 years. These data are US\$8 million and US\$72 million, respectively, for the Pacific Islands Regional Special Programme for Food Security.

In line with the recommendations of the Mauritius Strategy, the ongoing expansion phase of these programmes discussed at the Ministerial Meeting last week, reflects the importance of the activities addressing food quality and safety, natural disasters and climate change preparedness. It also focuses on capacity building activities, especially in national and international policy analysis and coherence, and protection and efficient use traditional knowledge in the conservation of indigenous species and their habitats.

The *Jagdeo Initiative* and the *Regional Fisheries Mechanism in the Caribbean*, or the *Pacific Agricultural Genetic Resources Network* are but some examples of admirable progress in regional cooperation, which, however, should be accelerated.

South-South Cooperation plays a key role in the Regional Programmes for Food Security in the Pacific as well as in the Caribbean. China and Philippines have sent in the Pacific Islands 56 agricultural experts and technicians specialized in agronomy, irrigation, livestock and fisheries, to work concretely in the field on projects to improve water management, increase crop and small animal production and promote aquaculture and artisanal fisheries. In the Caribbean, assistance programmes have started with Cuba and China, which have sent 40 and 28 technicians, respectively.

At the global level, the potential costs of globalization must be recognized, but the nature and pace of change should not jeopardize the ability of small and poor countries to defend their agricultural policies that preserve the rural people traditions. The richness of diversity must be respected. FAO should contribute to the development and implementation of codes and legislation in food safety and quality for the benefit of the SIDS.

The challenge for Small Islands Developing States at the upcoming 6th WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong (December 2005) is to obtain fairer trade regimes. Regional and international strategic alliances, including private-public partnerships, are crucial to helping SIDS to achieve stronger negotiation positions.

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FAO stands ready to continue providing its support to the governments and partners of the SIDS in their efforts to achieve the development goals agreed in the Millennium Declaration through: i) developing appropriate policy frameworks able to integrate economic, social and environmental concerns, with a special focus on pro-poor policies; ii) assisting the countries in the formulation of investment projects; iii) implementing coherent and effective programmes; iv) mobilizing domestic and external financing.

[The Director-General speaks extemporaneously thanking the Government of Italy]

I thank you for your attention and wish you a lively and productive meeting.