



## **The Permanent Mission of Iceland**

**Statement by  
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Ministry for Foreign Affairs**

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me begin by congratulating Dr José Graziano da Silva for his re-election as Director-General of FAO.

Iceland has always seen FAO having important role within multilateral forum. Best known in Iceland is FAO's important normative function in the field of fisheries.

Today Iceland has three main focus areas in its work with FAO; fisheries, land restoration and gender equality. These have also been among our focus areas in the Rio+20, the SDGs and the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

We all know how important this year is for all of us, as we are about to set new goals for The Future We Want; Universal Sustainable Development Goals, the New Development Agenda, Financing for Development, and Climate Change are all on the table. In all of this FAO has a significant role to play.

With the new SDGs in mind, allow me to highlight two issues in the context of food security and the need to end hunger. One is sustainable land management and the second is sustainable fisheries. In these fields FAO has to show a global leadership and be where it is needed among other stakeholders.

Mr. Chairman,

We cannot hide away from the fact that land degradation impedes the sustainable development of all countries and must therefore be taken seriously, because without healthy soils we will not be able to meet our new goals of the future we want.

It is estimated that 33% of global soil is moderately or highly degraded and every year an estimated 24 billion tons of fertile soil are lost due to erosion in the world's croplands. Desertification, land degradation and drought directly affect about 1.5 billion people around the world.

Thanks to FAO and its Member States, the United Nations did declare 2015 the International Year of Soils to remind us of the vital role soil plays in our existence on this planet.

95% of our food is directly or indirectly produced on our soils, and by 2050 agricultural production must increase by 60 percent globally – and by almost 100 percent in developing countries – just in order to meet food demand alone. In addition to this reality, we must not forget that in most countries there is little opportunity for expansion of arable land.

On the positive side we know how to solve these problems, and we have the means, we just have to act. To give an example, FAO has estimated that by practicing Sustainable Land Management we should be able to increase crop yield by 58%.

Mr. Chairman,

Fish is important to us all, but it is often overlooked how important it is to employment, food security, nutrition and income. Small-scale fisheries catch almost half of captured fish in the world and large proportions of this are small pelagic species. Fish is highly perishable; not least the small fish, and poor handling and processing practices compound enormous losses both in terms of volume and value.

Addressing post-harvest losses can multiply the value of the catch and harness the nutritional benefits fish can supply to the benefit of the fishing communities. Better health, food security and improved economy may then increase the likelihood of implementing sensible management of the resources, adding further benefits to communities and nations.

There is much at stake. Imagine what the impact would be, for instance, on the communities living around Lake Victoria, where the expanding fishery for the small fish *omena* or *dagaa* is approaching 1 million tons per year. Increasing the value per kilo by only 50 US cents would add \$500 million USD to the local economies each year. All this has been demonstrated in small projects around Lake Victoria.

This is all well recognized by FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department in their Blue Growth Initiative, which deserves a full support of Member States.

Mr Chairman,

Finally, allow me to end my statement by reminding all of us that none of the goals we are about to set this year will be reached without full recognition and implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment. Women are crucial for agriculture and fisheries, they play a key role in rural economies, where the fight against hunger and poverty is most pressing. And remember, sustainable development and gender equality are mutually reinforcing: one cannot happen without the other.

Gender equality and women's empowerment is not only economically and socially smart thing to do, for real and lasting progress, more importantly it regards the fulfillment of basic human rights.

I thank you.