

*Original language Italian – checked against transcription of English interpretation*

**Statement delivered by  
His Excellency Franco Manzato  
Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and  
Forestry Policies of the Republic of Italy  
on the occasion of the  
41<sup>st</sup> Session of the FAO Conference, Rome, Italy (22-29 June 2019)  
25 June 2019**

Thank you Mr Chairman,  
Ministers,  
Heads of Delegations,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express to the newly elected Director-General Mr Qu Dongyu our greatest congratulations for the result achieved and the best wishes for a fruitful assignment. I would also like to thank the other two candidates, Ms Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle and Mr Davit Kirvalidze who, with their electoral campaign, have brought to all of our attention some issues of great interest that I think can be taken into account in FAO strategy over the next four years.

To the incoming Director-General Qu Dongyu, I say that as a host country, Italy will be an ally of yours and commits to providing the greatest support to strengthening FAO.

In recent years we have witnessed a process of decentralization of FAO which has favoured the closeness and rapprochement with the Organization to the areas in the field. This path, however, in order to be effective, has to guarantee the necessary and constant link with headquarters, so as to enhance in the best possible way the assets of the organization. I think that this has to be complemented by the strategic role played by Rome as the headquarters and the enhancement of the technical know-how and human resources at the Rome headquarters.

The Italian Government is also ready to engage in an immediate discussion on issues of common interest. First and foremost, FAO has a fundamental supporting role in the Agenda 2030 and in the promotion of sustainable agriculture and we have to be able to complement or link agriculture productivity and the Zero Hunger Objective with the respect of the environment and preservation of resources. This is a principle that must be upheld everywhere throughout the globe, both in developed and developing countries.

Italy has a great heritage in terms of agricultural biodiversity, and I do believe that FAO must continue to deploy efforts to help countries to preserve and restore biodiversity in their territory which gives great value and uniqueness to their local products. In this respect, I would like to mention the work carried out within the framework of the Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources which has proven to be a valid tool to preserve biodiversity. I would also like to recall the importance of promoting the economy of rural areas.

The issue that we are focusing on at this Conference is of great relevance today. The connection between the development of territory and migration flows indicate that the migration emergency that we are witnessing throughout the globe requires a joint and collaborative effort between countries of origin, transit and destination. We have to implement policies that on the one hand bring about development in the countries of origin, and on the other, ensure the end of illegal trafficking and the settlement and regulation flows through agreements amongst countries. In this context, agriculture can be an instrument for the development of rural areas that is capable of fostering the creation of wealth and consequently, reducing some of the causes underlying migration.

Another issue that FAO is already working on, and that I deem to be essential for the achievement of the goals under Agenda 2030, is family farming. The Decade dedicated to this issue can be a great

opportunity to implement policies aimed at supporting an agricultural model that will ensure the production of food for humankind.

Regarding nutrition and food models, I would like to say that Italy is very attentive to the health of consumers and promotes balanced diets. Indeed, a Mediterranean diet is universally recognized as the model of a healthy diet. We are open to dialogue when it comes to food policies at a global level, but I wish to underscore that with regard to nutrition, we believe that all choices must be based on scientific evidence. The links between cultural traditions and local products must be further enhanced and promoted. I appreciate in this respect the initiative of the Italian representation to organize seminars on these issues starting with September and coinciding with the Tenth UNESCO Acknowledgement of the Importance of Mediterranean diet.

I would like to close by making a reference to innovation and research that we need to pay more attention to if we want to rise to the challenges of the future. Farmers have to be able to tap into all the tools that science makes available to them to improve the productivity and sustainability of agriculture and FAO must be right alongside countries to find solutions and make them accessible to all farmers.

Thank you.