

*Checked against delivery*

**Statement delivered by  
The Honourable Damien O'Connor  
Minister for Agriculture, Biosecurity, Food Safety and Rural Communities of New Zealand  
on the occasion of the  
41<sup>st</sup> Session of the FAO Conference, Rome, Italy (22-29 June 2019)  
24 June 2019**

Mr Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Mr Director General,  
Distinguished Delegates and Friends,

I am pleased to address the 41<sup>st</sup> Session of the FAO Conference. I would like to offer my congratulations to Dr Qu Dongyu and your election to the position of Director-General and acknowledge the two other candidates for enabling a robust democratic process.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the outgoing Director-General Dr Graziano da Silva for his leadership over the last eight years. Your reform initiatives around decentralization and strengthening of regional and country office networks have brought the organization closer to its members.

In this context, New Zealand encourages FAO to further strengthen its links with regional organizations to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration. The FAOs strength lies within its people and we look to the new leadership to further enhance FAOs reputation as the global center for excellence for food and agriculture. We also look for it to foster an organizational culture based on the values of collaboration, non-discrimination and mutual respect.

Mr Chairman, New Zealand welcomes the focus of this year's Conference on the theme of migration, agriculture and rural development. In recent years the world has seen unprecedented movements of people across borders driven by a range of social, political and economic factors. For many countries, including New Zealand, this migration has helped drive economic growth and stimulate productivity and innovation.

Since the arrival of our [Mauri language] our original inhabitants of our land, migration has played a central role in New Zealand's social and economic development. Demand for agricultural labour was a key early driver of migration and this continues to be the case today. In recent years, steady economic growth and strong demand for labour in agriculture and other growth sectors has resulted in record levels of net migration from virtually every continent. We expect this to continue for the foreseeable future.

FAO's work to help revitalize rural areas and promote productive employment represents an important contribution to efforts to address rural poverty and give people hope for a future within rural communities.

The agricultural sector is also a vital piece in the puzzle in our efforts to respond to climate change. The changing global climate will hit many rural communities hard and many will look to FAO for assistance in adapting. There is also much to be done to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from our agricultural sector. We need to help our farmers produce safer, and more nutritious food in greater quantities and with less environmental impact. We already have a number of tools to help us achieve this through sustainable resource management and innovation. We now need to help countries take up these tools while continuing to develop new and more effective ones. New Zealand values its contribution with FAO in this area, particularly through FAO's partnership with the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gasses.

The significance of climate change for Pacific Island countries is already well known. Future sea level rise has the potential to erase some of our Pacific neighbours from the map within our lifetimes, causing widespread migration from and within the region, unless we act decisively now. Pacific Island countries already face major changes in terms of geographical dispersion, the scale of the agricultural sectors and distance from markets. They will continue to require strong support from bilateral and multilateral partners including FAO tailored to their size and unique circumstances.

FAO continues to have a central role to play in its core mission of improving food security, as recently reaffirmed in the UN's ambitious Sustainable Development Goals, the so-called 2030 Agenda. Ending hunger is obviously the central goal of our efforts to achieve food security, but there is more to it than that. Food security also means improving the nutritional quality of the food people eat. This is the major priority for the Pacific Region whether FAO is to make steady obesity and non-communicable diseases account for more than 75 percent of adult deaths. New Zealand supports the work of FAO in addressing this.

Within the framework of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition and Action Plan for Food Security and Nutrition in Small Island Developing States. Reducing food loss and wastage in food systems and value chains is another important means of enhancing food security. Again, FAO has an important role to play through its technical assistance programs and normative work.

For most countries, national food production has its limits. As such international trade is also an essential part of most food security strategies. This means reducing trade barriers and promoting sound agricultural and trade policies that facilitate trade and efficient resource utilization. FAO plays a central role in this through its support for the Codex Alimentarius Commission, which establishes international food standards to protect health and facilitate trade.

New Zealand also values the work of the International Plant Protection Convention in developing international plant health standards. Like others here today, New Zealand wishes to underline the importance of adequately resourcing these bodies to meet growing demands from members.

Finally, Mr Chairman, I reiterate New Zealand's sincere thanks to the outgoing Director-General for his committed service over the last eight years. New Zealand looks forward to working with the new Director-General and building on your success in advancing the organization's work program.

Thank you very much.