

**Statement delivered by
The Honourable Lopao'o Natanielu Mua
Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries of the Independent State of Samoa
on the occasion of the
41st Session of the FAO Conference, Rome, Italy (22-29 June 2019)
25 June 2019**

Good afternoon Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start with a quote. This is a quote of a statement made by Ted Kennedy at the funeral of his brother Bobby Kennedy. It goes like this: "Some men see things as they are and ask why. I dream things that never were and ask why not."

I have a lot of dreams about what agriculture can do for my country and my question is, "Can we do it?" I will now focus on the linkages between migration, agricultural and rural development in Samoa. Samoa has a GDP per capita of about USD 4 000 and a lower middle-income country status. Like other Small Island Developing States, we are one of the least emitters and polluters, but one of the most vulnerable to frequent and intense natural disasters resulting from climate change. Our households are also vulnerable to external shocks, particularly food and fuel price increases. Our economic transformation is constrained by a narrow, natural resource space, a small domestic market, limited exports, heavy reliance on imports and our geographical remoteness. Agriculture is central to sustaining growth and ensuring inclusive transformation in Samoa. A high share of our labour force is engaged in agriculture. Agriculture and fisheries employ two thirds of our country's labour of force and provide the bulk of our limited exports, but contribute only 10 percent of our GDP.

In addition to its contribution to household incomes and livelihoods, agriculture has a significant influence on nutrition and health outcomes, given our country's remoteness and high transport cost. Agriculture has historically been dominated by our village-based, mixed farming system grown on communally owned lands, which provide food for the village and some cash income, from occasional surplus, to funding households. Our village-based agricultural economy is changing rapidly, however. Food consumption is now supplemented by imported processed foods and family incomes are boosted by migration and remittances. Nonetheless, all our rural households still grow some crops or raise some livestock and more than one half are encased in subsistence agriculture as their main activity.

Eighty percent of our population of about 200 000 people is rural and 50 percent are young people. Securing employment is a challenge for our young Samoans, particularly, rural areas. About 16 percent of our young people and 20 percent of our young women are unemployed, illustrating the lack of opportunities for them. Attracting our young people to agricultural education is hampered by their perception of our farming's low profitability. With limited opportunities and high vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change, our rural households rely on migration and remittances as a critical support for local consumption, an import strategy for coping with risk, Samoa has one of the largest overseas diaspora groups in the Pacific. Around 30 000 Samoan-born live overseas either permanently or under seasonal work programs in New Zealand and Australia.

Unfortunately, for our national development aspiration, our young people with higher levels of education and skills are the most likely to migrate. The increasing net of rural to urban migration and eventually international migration, mainly to New Zealand and Australia, resulting from the lack of development and employment opportunity in the agricultural sector compared to other sectors of our economy, such as tourism and other services, are due to better employment opportunities overseas and will continue to impede our national agricultural development plans.

In consideration of the aforesaid, our government, via established and in the pipeline, public - private partnership arrangements and financial assistance from our development partners, are formulating agricultural development incentives such as stimulus packages and matching grants for farming, to name a couple. This is in order to induce our rural people to stay and farm their fertile lands for income generation purposes, and thereby curb their rural to urban and international migrations for perceivably better employment and livelihood opportunities. This is very important for Samoa because without our young, educated and skilled people we will struggle to enhance and maintain our full security, increase import replacement and expand our export markets.

In closing, I wish to take this opportunity on behalf of our government and our people to acknowledge with much appreciation the outgoing Director-General and our High Chief, Dr José Graziano da Silva, for his excellent services to FAO and, in particular, the Pacific island countries. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours and I hope you come to Samoa soon. I also wish to congratulate our incoming Director-General, Dr Dongyu on behalf of Samoa on your election and look forward to working with you to realize FAOs long-term plans for the development of agriculture in our Small Island Developing States in the Pacific Region. I further acknowledge the French and Georgian candidates for sharing their visions and aspirations with the wider membership of FAO.

Honourable Chairman,

Thank you for the opportunity given to speak. God bless you.