

STATEMENT BY DR. BABAGANA AHMADU FAOR

MoU SIGNING CEREMONY BETWEEN NAMIBIAN STANDARDS INSTITUTION (NSI) AND THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO)

Thank You Director of Ceremony,

Permanent Secretary, Mr. Malan Lindeque;
Chairperson of the NSI Council, Mrs. Kandawa-Schulz;
NSI Council Members present;
Chief Executive Officer of the NSI, Mr. Riundja Ali Kaakunga;
Executive Management members and staff of NSI;
Colleagues from the UN family;
Honored Guests;
Members of the Media;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

First of all, I wish to express FAO's sincere thanks to you my brother, Mr. Riundja Ali Kaakunga, and the NSI Council and Management, for the active efforts towards establishment of this partnership between the NSI and FAO of the United Nations and thoughtful arrangements you have made for today's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signing ceremony. You have been wonderful hosts both in your own office building down town, and today externally. Additionally, I would like to thank the stakeholders present here today, recognizing the presence of the Accounting Officers of various institutions and agencies on the importance attached to the formalized partnership between the FAO and NSI.

On behalf of the FAO, I pronounce our gratefulness to be technical partners in support of the NSI's mandate falling within FAO's comparative advantage. FAO has been happy

to support Namibia's development agenda, and in our 68 years of existence, FAO has seen how innovation can help developing countries address the many challenges they face in agriculture, fisheries, rural development, and in natural resource management. FAO also shares a long history with the Republic of Namibia, its institutions and her people. Few days ago at the African Union Heads of State Summit in Malabo – Equatorial Guinea, under a high level delegation headed by His Excellency President Pohamba, the Namibian Government has endorsed FAO technical assistance to the value of about N\$40 million in support of “Strengthening controls of food safety, plant and animal pests and diseases for agricultural productivity and trade in Southern Africa”. Gladly today in Windhoek Namibia, we cement this cordial relations into programmatic partnership aimed at contributing to national goals of accelerated economic growth, increased income equality, and the creation of the much needed employment opportunities particularly among women and the youth.

The world has made strides in the fight against hunger and in increasing agricultural production, and yet nearly 870 million people still suffer from chronic undernourishment. FAO is committed to contribute in ending hunger, guaranteeing food security for all and increasing sustainable food production and agro value-chains. As ascribed in the MoU we are about to sign, we are sharpening the focus of our work and changing the way we work to give a more concrete contribution to national development goals.

It is the intention and hope of the FAO and the NSI, as well as everyone here today, that this agreement will put us on the path of forward progress in improving agro industry productivity and trade. The MoU will help us to align activities, focus on strengthening the capacity of the NSI and related industry players, and achieve mutually beneficial results creating stronger systems of national agro standards management, higher quality of agro products and information, culminating in increased output of marketable products and industry competitiveness.

FAO is the only organization that gathers the necessary technical competence to assist countries in the implementation of their obligations under the Agreement on the

Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures of the World Trade Organization, through its work on animal health, plant health and food safety issues. It hosts the Secretariats of the International Plant Protection Convention and of Codex Alimentarius, two of the three international standard setting organizations recognized for the purpose of the SPS agreement.

These Secretariats provides independent scientific advice on food safety and nutrition which serves as the basis for international standards. We develop institutional and individual capacities for food control and food safety management in many countries, including the management of food safety emergencies. We support processes for the development of food safety policy frameworks and facilitate global access to information and encourages and support the development of food safety/quality networks.

Pursuant to our mandate, we work closely with governments not only to improve food productions to ensure that people have enough food at their tables but also to ensure that the food produced and put at their disposal is of **quality, safe** and **nutritious** which are the three very important pre-requisite to food security. Consumers have the right to expect that the food available on domestic markets or imported is safe and of the expected quality. FAO has a track record of working with governmental authorities, with local industry and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that this expectation is met. The overall goal of our Organization on this subject is to improve systems of food safety and quality management, based on scientific principles that lead to reduced foodborne illness and support fair and transparent trade thereby contributing to economic development, improved livelihoods and food security.

FAO's basic aim is to create sustainable increases in agricultural productivity, the competitiveness of the products produced, and improvements in the supply and availability of food and other products from the crop, livestock, fisheries and forestry sectors.

Encouraging rural producers to participate more in local markets and supporting more commercialized producers to better access sophisticated value chains raise different issues with respect to both their ability and willingness to increase production for sale.

There is therefore no 'one size fits all' solution to encourage greater market participation by smallholders.

The adoption of more sustainable practices in agricultural production and trade is a primary concern for FAO. Standards and certification systems will benefit our farming community, as they can potentially lead to increased return on their labor, better working conditions and longer term environmental improvement. They may offer small farmers an opportunity to stay in business, through the support of consumers who are willing to pay a price premium. These initiatives may also benefit the local communities surrounding the farms and the environment. When they lead to local development through higher incomes, job creation and capacity building, they benefit society as a whole.

FAO has the capacity to support the NSI and its stakeholders in appreciating the importance of smallholder market participation and the approaches to enhancing participation in the Namibian economy, with particular attention to the role of public-private partnerships and producer associations. Similarly, support to the Small and Medium Enterprises is at the heart of the work of the NSI, and our collective approaches will ensure strengthened intervention to linking Namibian farmers and fishers to mainstream markets.

At the recent request of the Government, FAO is now preparing to support Namibia in the finalization of legal instruments related to national food safety systems and adherence to international standards. We are here because the NSI recognize that Namibia not only needs to exchange experiences in the face of the growing human economic and social costs, but also take action and improve collaboration. FAO will draw on its global experience through its large number of projects, at national and regional levels, covering all aspects of food safety systems, from food law to laboratory testing and inspection, Good Agricultural Practices and certification systems within a holistic food chain approach in a cost effective manner. We remain fully committed to

working with the Namibian authorities to achieve these objectives for the benefit of the Namibian population.

We are all aware that it is becoming increasingly difficult for national standards bodies to cope with the growing number and complexity of various industries, human demands, and trade regulations. Despite these, NSI has shown capacity to steer its complex mandate in Namibia. FAO is pleased that NSI continue to increase and strengthen its capacity to address the need for sustainable and transformative change in the way systems of the food related industry operate, for the benefit of human health and development of food trade, and ultimately help eliminate hunger around the world. We share your focus and responsibility to provide leadership in Namibian standards, and hence FAO engagement with you through this MOU for many years to come.

I thank you.