

Statement by Australia

CSD-16: Rural Development and Agriculture Thematic Discussion, 6-7 May 2008

Mr Chairman

I would like to thank the panel members for their contributions – we have been served very well both yesterday and today by their focused expert presentations.

I would like to briefly comment on three aspects of our discussions thus far.

Firstly, Australia believes that more open trade policies are key contributors to development and poverty alleviation. Australia wants to offer strong support for calls from speakers who have stressed the urgency of completing the WTO's Doha Development Round to advance liberalisation of agricultural trade.

We know that agriculture is the most distorted sector of merchandise trade in the world and reforming world agricultural markets is critical to achieving long-term food security. In the past, subsidies and support programs have kept world prices artificially low and prevented developing countries from expanding their food production and exports. And the restrictions on food exports that some countries are now imposing are exacerbating the current high prices.

Second, Mr Chairman, quarantine was raised yesterday in comments on the importance to developing countries of gaining market access for their agricultural products. Australia continues to maintain a robust, science-based biosecurity system to safeguard its agricultural industries against the introduction, establishment and spread of harmful pests and diseases. But, we appreciate that meeting strict quarantine requirements presents a serious challenge for many developing countries.

In recognition of this, Australia has been contributing significant effort and funding for sanitary and phytosanitary capacity-building activities for countries in our region, especially in South East Asia and the Pacific island countries.

Finally, Australia is well aware that climate change has the potential to adversely affect agricultural production in many countries, including Australia. This will be particularly so in countries already suffering from food insecurity and fragile environments. In response to this, Australia strongly supports integrating adaptation responses into agricultural policies and natural resource management programs.

Thank you Mr Chairman