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Statement of the

Food and Agriculture Organization with the United Nations (FAO)

at the

**First Intersessional Meeting of the
United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development**

**Session II: Green Economy in the Context of
Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication**

**United Nations
New York
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Mr. Co-Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

With reference to the green economy, I would like to recall three points:

- Agriculture and forests occupy about 60% of the Earth's surface, farming uses 70% of all water withdrawals, and agriculture and forestry combined are responsible for 30% of all greenhouse gas emissions;
- Farming, livestock raising, forestry and fisheries provide livelihoods for approximately 2.6 billion people;
- Agricultural growth has greater poverty-reducing effects than any non-agriculture sector.

As these points indicate, agriculture and food systems can be considered the most cost-effective solution for the green economy, as outcomes are likely to be far higher than a similar effort in any other sectors in improving the environment, providing livelihoods and alleviating poverty.

Acknowledging that current agricultural management systems are among the major contributors to deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, water use and biodiversity loss, the question is how to manage agriculture and food systems ecologically, while continuing to provide – and even increase – economic benefits in terms of livelihoods and food security? In other words, how can we produce more with less and, at the same time, create healthy landscapes, promote ecosystem services and sequester more carbon?

More food, more jobs that provide improved livelihoods, and less environmental impact mean more ecological and economic efficiency at all levels of the food chain: from the resources used during production, through waste minimization at post-harvest, retail and consumption levels, to trade policies.

Clearly, there are success stories whereby agriculture provides economic growth, environmental stewardship and poverty alleviation. We heard yesterday about organic agriculture in Uganda and many other sustainable agriculture examples that exist worldwide. But, how to scale-up such models? What are the investments needed for agriculture to leave a smaller resource footprint? How do we gauge financing gaps and promote alternative financing mechanisms? How do we protect the most vulnerable in this transition? What enabling conditions and policy instruments are needed to establish low-carbon food systems?

These and other questions are being explored by FAO. In fact, the Organization is preparing for an expert meeting in September 2011 that will discuss how the green economy translates in the food and agriculture sector, including potential opportunities and constraints. In the preparatory process, we plan to work with selected countries on assessing progress and gaps over the last 20 years and also to model food chain development scenarios towards 2050.

The Rio+20 process is a unique opportunity to turn an argument on its head and reconcile ecological, economic and social imperatives by investing in sustainable agriculture. Greening the Economy with Agriculture incidentally gives us a new acronym: GEA, meaning the Earth, the mother Earth who feeds us.

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, member countries,

A green economy is simply not possible without the food and agriculture sector. Any sustainable development strategy (or road map), be it international, national or local, needs sustainable food production and consumption patterns. I mention here that the participation of agriculture in GDP is not significant, but GDP *per se* is a misleading indicator of economies, as any economy also includes informal activities. Considering the current percentage of agricultural land use and the number of people depending on this activity for survival, we can confidently say that at least one-third of our natural and human capital is today at stake. Also, exploring green economy potentials in the agriculture and food sector inherently implies dwelling on social impact and poverty alleviation. With population growth and increased incomes in developing countries, the demand on natural resources for food production is expected to rise further in the next decades, well beyond the so-called “safe operating space for humanity”, with more disparities, more armed conflicts, more price crises...

The focus on the green economy emerged (or revived) during the financial crisis of 2008, which itself followed food, fuel fuel and climate crisis. Unfortunately, these distressing crises are not over. It is time to act to reverse perverse trends but this will only be possible if there is willingness to act collectively. Delegates from environment ministries: please call upon your national agriculture colleagues and forge partnerships for Greening the Economy with Agriculture. Everybody will benefit – nature, people, the economy.

FAO will also do its part. We stand ready to mobilize the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors in this direction, and to work with both private and public partners as a contribution to the UNCSD process and beyond.

The GEA Report will look into costs and benefits for:

- low footprint and resilient food systems;
- decent rural livelihoods and green jobs; and
- trade, investments and good governance pathways.

All of these are critical elements that will contribute to our understanding and our ability to offer development scenarios and recommendations for informed decision-making.

Thank you for your attention.