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**Statement by the Netherlands government to the Intergovernmental
Preparatory meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development on
the FAO/Netherlands Conference**

**Water for Food and Ecosystems,
Make it Happen!**

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Mr. Chairman,

I would like to introduce the results of the FAO/Netherlands Conference Water for Food and Ecosystems.

The Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystem was held as a joint initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN and the Government of the Netherlands from 31 January – 5 February 2005. About 500 representatives of countries, civil society and private sector participated in this conference.

The Conference included a Ministerial Round Table, chaired by His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange of the Netherlands.

About 30 ministers responsible for Water, for Agriculture or the Environment participated in this round table.

The conference focused on the implementation of international commitments on water for food and ecosystems.

So far the focus is mostly on drinking water and sanitation.

Those important "watsan" activities should be complemented with an equally intense focus on integrated water management in rural areas.

Why? Because the majority of the poor and the hungry live in rural areas, rural development is an essential weapon in the struggle against poverty.

The UN Millennium Project Report Investing In Development recently confirmed the importance of rural food production.

According to the report, the agricultural chain – production, processing and marketing – is the main driver of economic growth and social development in developing countries.

Needless to repeat that integrated water management is a crucial factor in this: no water, no food.

The conference, with the subtitle Make It Happen, was dedicated to action. Time is short, as we're all aware, after all, we have committed ourselves to make the Millennium Development Goals a reality by 2015 – only a decade from now.

Water management is an essential part of the efforts to reach them.

Agriculture, ecosystems and water management are, so to speak, members of the same family.

Both their conservation and their sustainable use are cornerstones for sustainable development.

Conservation, because we have the responsibility to preserve the still overwhelming, but rapidly diminishing biodiversity of this planet for ourselves and, more importantly, for generations to come.

And sustainable use, because nature – and nature alone – provides us with the resources for our continued existence.

Each one percent rise in agricultural production translates into an average drop of about one percent in the number of the very poor. Having access to enough clean water is of course not the only condition for successful agriculture, but it is certainly an important one.

The essence of the conference was the positive power of water as a key factor for sustainable development.

The conference made it clear that we have to strike a new balance between water for human beings, water for food production and water for a healthy ecosystem.

It also showed that the pace must be accelerated and that we have to take a broader view.

If not, we will not meet the targets set for 2015.

The strength of the conference was the sharing of concrete progress made on the basis of lessons learned from case studies.

They clearly showed that international commitments can be made concrete as long as we define these in concrete activities for each involved actor.

The conference defined on the basis of three themes, Fostering Implementation: Know-how for action, a New Economy for Water and an Enabling Environment, concrete activities per actor to really make it happen.

The question was: who should do what? What is the role of governments, of the business sector, of civil society? There are no easy answers to this, but the Conference showed the way forward.

First, actively seek the involvement of the local people.

They are the custodians of their rural areas, their natural resources, and their ecosystems.

Local experience in managing them is built on the lessons going back generations.

Secondly: get rid of the notion that the government should always take the lead.

Governments cannot and will not go it alone any more.

Laws have to be adopted and enforced, visions for the future agreed upon, enabling environments created.

But politicians should not be involved in micromanaging anything, from whole societies to specific water management projects.

Thirdly: the key role of civil society organizations and the business world.

NGOs offer a platform for people's concerns and ideas.

The business sector throws entrepreneurship and capacity building into the equation. Governments, NGOs and the business sector should form development partnerships.

To reverse the declining trend in finance for sustainable agriculture, investments have to be made in sustainable intensification of agriculture, which includes cost saving through water efficiency improvements, recycling and waste reduction.

Furthermore, investments in water for food and ecosystems are directed to:

- Economize the use of water as a scarce resource, to make people aware of limitations in water use and the need to cooperate and share water for food and ecosystems;
- Promote wise use of water by approaches such as allocation of land and water rights, quota systems, and
- Develop, where appropriate, experiences with economic incentives like water pricing mechanisms.

Since we know what we need to do, let us now concentrate on how to promote implementation on the ground.

The message of the Conference is to integrate, to cooperate and to invest.

Integrate

It is pertinent to move away from a sectoral approach – which has not been

successful in addressing the complex and critical challenges of sustainable development, poverty eradication and food security – to an integrated approach. Therefore the conference concluded:

- Make sure that the water, agricultural and environmental sectors are integrated in rural water management, and related to sectors such as tourism, fisheries, mining and energy;
- Consider rural water management a cornerstone for rural development;
- Look into social, economic and ecological interdependencies between urban and rural areas;
- Develop and manage legislation, policies and strategies, programmes, institutions, and capacity building activities in a coherent manner.

Cooperate

The scarcity of water, hunger, the loss of biodiversity and climate change are common concerns to all of us.

There is a strong willingness to cooperate, in a way in which we:

- Actively involve all stakeholders and recognize their rights to land and water, while they fulfil their responsibilities to preserve and manage natural resources in a sustainable manner;
- Acknowledge the dedication, experience and skills of local people, as custodians of rural areas and natural resources;
- Promote public-private partnerships;
- Ensure that government roles are clearly defined at all levels: what they should do, how they should work together, where they should give way to civil society;
- Engage actively in transboundary, regional and global cooperation.

Invest

Substantive resources are needed to make it happen, both from the public and private sector.

Given that agro-systems and natural ecosystems are constituted by the same principles of life, such investments are to be based on sound ecology in agriculture and sound economics in biodiversity conservation.

The results of the Conference will have to be incorporated in international implementation programmes.

The results of the Conference send also a clear signal to the Commission on Sustainable Development on water for food and ecosystems.

Member countries requested FAO to come forward with a concrete plan of action on how the FAO is going to implement the recommendations and concrete proposals for action.

The report is available at the back of the room. Furthermore, tomorrow during lunch time a side event will be organised in private dining room 6 on the 4th floor where the results of the Conference will be presented.

Snacks and drinks will be served.

The Conference clearly showed the international community that we can make it happen, let us do it now.

Thank you.