

**Closing Statement by Ms. Gerda Verburg, Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Chairperson of the 17th**

**Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development**

**(CSD-17)**

**“Capacity Development Workshop and Inter-sessional Meeting on Improving Agricultural Productivity, Water Use Efficiency and Strengthening Rural Livelihoods”, Bangkok, Thailand, 28-30 January 2009**

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Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- First of all, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the government of Thailand and the organizers of this workshop and our host, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific, for the warm welcome and the excellent way you organized this work and the way how you conducted your work. Also you, delegates and participants, deserve gratitude for your hard work and excellent results.
- It is an honor and pleasure for me to be here at the Capacity Building Workshop in my capacity as Chairperson of the 17<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission for Sustainable Development.

- It seems to be that we are living in a world full of crises. Food crisis, energy crisis and of course the financial crisis. Although the financial crisis is dominating world news, the effects of the food crisis could get more devastating.
- Let us not forget that a few months ago the news was full of the man-made silent tsunami of food security. With a devastating effects for millions of the world's poorest people.

### ***What is the Problem?***

- Let me start with some facts.

We live in a world in which the average income per capita is higher than any time in the past.

Enough food is being produced to feed everyone!

More than 2 billion people are living on less than \$ 2 a day and yet nearly a billion people still live on less than \$ 1 dollar a day. Most of them depend on agriculture for their daily livelihoods.

Worldwide our governments made in the commitment to reduce by half the number of people living in poverty by 2015.

The achievement of this first Millennium Development Goal is further away than ever.

- In today's unfavorable context of financial turmoil and high food and oil prices, there is a general view that food prices would ease during this year.

The bad news is that the food prices will most likely remain well above their pre-2007 level. Also their volatility will remain.

- There are a number of causes for the high food prices, such as neglected agricultural investments, less available farm land, droughts, growing demand for biofuels and changing consumption patterns.

But one overarching message is clear: we have neglected agriculture too much for too many years.

- At the same time we are confronted with ever rising trends in energy consumption and climate change.

They are and should be a major concern to us as well, as they will have a huge impact on our future.

- Reports show that we use far more of our natural resources than our planet can regenerate.

Some reports indicate even four times!

And let us not forget that the world population would reach 9 billion in 2050.

- We all have to face these dilemmas, including the dilemma of competing claims for food and fuel. We also have to face competing claims on land and water. Agriculture is the main user of water, about 70%, of our fresh water resources.
- As a global society, we cannot accept increasing levels of poverty and hunger.  
At the same time we need energy en water security. Combined with the urgent need to find effective policies to stop the loss of biodiversity, this means we are faced with one of the toughest challenges of today.
- We have to look forward now.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

- One thing is clear there are no easy answers. Efforts to fix it are within our reach. But it will man change in policies for both the short and long term. Business as usual is not a option.  
Political choices have to be made, for example to which extend to encourage food production or biofuels. Choices have to be made and not just by governments but also by the private sector and civil society.

- Biofuels seemed to be an answer, but opinions are changing. To get rid of the myths. Firstly, at this moment only 1% of arable land is used for biofuels. Secondly, reports show that the environmental costs of producing biofuels may be higher than other land uses. Let us not forget the statistic of the World Bank: it takes the same amount grain to fill the tank of a SUV with ethanol as it does to feed one person for a year. So, there are no trade-offs here.

*Dear Delegates and Participants*

### ***CSD 17***

- Looking at CSD-17, I am motivated by all the challenges we face; in agriculture, rural development, water, land, the food crisis. My deepest hope is that countries will make the sustainable agricultural and rural development agenda central to achieving sustainable development and reducing poverty in line with the principles agreed under the JPOI. This CSD should aim at providing further concrete and tangible solutions.

- This workshop has generated a number of useful ideas and recommendations to advance the agricultural and rural development agenda; to increase food production while managing the resources sensibly; conditions that need to be created for another green revolution; and how to address the challenge of competing demands on land and water resources.
- In my opinion solutions can be found along a five track approach. Your recommendations are also going into that direction. They will be very helpful in addressing the issues and challenges faced by agriculture development, water management and rural livelihoods.
- First and foremost, we have to respond by *substantially investing more in sustainable agriculture* again, especially in Africa. In many countries the productivity can and should be considerably improved in a sustainable way. This should be done by sharing knowledge, technology transfer and capacity building. This workshop identified some interesting capacity building gaps in the area of land and water management.
- Secondly, by *creating an enabling environment*. At the end only the private sector can do it.

But, governments can set conditions and frameworks for attracting private investments.

Especially land tenure rights are critical for this. Participants underlined the importance of integrating land and water management at all different levels during this workshop. Also the importance of dispute settlement regarding land was mentioned. Empowering poor farmers is another critical factor.

Specifically, women's participation in decision-making processes in the areas of agriculture and rural development has been neglected for too long.

Women are key for programs on agricultural productivity to succeed.

- Thirdly, by *developing sustainable production chains*. Developing a safe and sustainable food chain, from production, processing and marketing to us as consumers. The workshop panel put the interesting question on the table on how much 'virtual' water is lost with the high amount of post-harvest losses.  
Today, agricultural sustainability spans the globe, the whole value chain of food – and agriculture-related inputs and outputs, and includes some outcomes such as nutrition, health and safety.
- Fourthly, by *improving market access*, especially for developing countries. Supporting the development of local and regional

markets should get more priority. And last but not least by providing more market access for products from developing countries.

- The fifth track is *food security and emergency food aid*. For example via enhanced safety nets for the most vulnerable people and increased lending possibilities, for example via micro credits.
- As a last issue I would like to focus now on the role of *governance*, which also came up in the several presentations and roundtables.
- In order to ensure a long-term response, the goals of poverty eradication, food security and sustainable natural resource management need to be seen as inter-linked and addressed in a more coherent manner.
- Upon closing of this Workshop, I would like to re-assure you that the upcoming CSD provides a unique platform to tackle the challenges at hand.  
Its role is more important than ever.
- Governments can and should take a leading role in facilitating and promoting sustainable technological innovations. We should respond by investing more in public-private partnerships.



- I would like to reiterate to you that as a Chairperson of CSD17, I will work closely with you to ensure an outcome of strong political decisions and to advance the agricultural and rural development agenda. I will count on you.
- Only together we can assure that our common aspirations for the implementation of a fundamentally changed agricultural policy and green economy can become a reality for the benefit of our children and our grand children.
- I declare this meeting closed.

Thank you.