

Concluding Remarks of Ambassador Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General, UN-DESA  
High-Level Meeting on African Agriculture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have had a rich discussion over the past few days, which has yielded a forceful statement of priorities for negotiation by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its 17<sup>th</sup> Session. We come away from this meeting with a deeper understanding of what is needed to address the structural difficulties facing African agriculture, to ensure food security throughout the continent, to boost crop yields on a sustainable basis, to improve management of agricultural land and of scarce water resources, to integrate Africa's agriculture more fully into global markets, and to produce higher value products which can boost rural living standards.

We have no time to waste. We have goals agreed at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, the first of which is to achieve a halving of poverty and hunger by 2015. But, the urgency of revolutionizing African agriculture stems not from an internationally agreed deadline, but from the daily toll which poverty and hunger take on human lives and human potential. Each hungry child or expecting mother is a life shortchanged. Hunger further weakens the many farmers already burdened by debilitating diseases. This makes it that much harder to boost productivity. The vicious cycle of poverty, hunger, ill health and low productivity can and must be broken.

To break will require resolve and resources, not just of African governments but of the international community. More resources must be put into agricultural R&D in Africa. More must be invested in rural infrastructure. More must be devoted to rural health care and education, to help boost human productivity.

It goes without saying that, given the severe resource constraints Africa faces, every effort must be made to stretch available resources, to use them as efficiently as possible. Here an educated population can make a difference, together with accountable government.

African farmers have proven their ability to eke out a living in harsh conditions. In doing so, they have demonstrated deep knowledge of the land and entrepreneurial skills. Yet, their ability to use that knowledge and those skills to more remunerative ends continues to be stymied by adverse physical, institutional and policy environments. Policies to support African agriculture must be strengthened, both nationally and internationally. At the international level, we must ensure that African farmers have free and fair access to world agricultural markets, and that they have the means to respond to new market opportunities. This will require significant progress in international trade negotiations as well as favorable terms in bilateral agreements. It will require technical support to build institutional capacity for product testing and certification as well as financial support to investment in critical infrastructure.

In the midst of a global financial crisis and credit squeeze, there is a real risk that these needs will go unmet. We must ensure that does not happen. As leaders of some of the richest and largest economies in the world discuss a global stimulus plan a global new deal, we must insist that this include a new deal for African farmers. That is the urgent message which we will bring to the international community, not just in the upcoming Commission on Sustainable Development but in other high-level fora which will be held this year in an effort to address the unfolding crisis.

I wish you all a safe trip back home and every success in your efforts in support of African agriculture in this, the year of the ox.