

**Sixth Meeting of FAO South-West Pacific Ministers for Agriculture
Cook Islands, 1-3 June 2005**

**Keynote Address by Jacques Diouf
Director-General
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am greatly honoured to address this important meeting, which since the inauguration of the FAO Sub-Regional Office for the Pacific Islands in 1996, you have decided to convene on a biennial basis with a view to strengthening the partnership between FAO and the Pacific. These meetings assist FAO in recognizing the challenges that your countries face, and that deserve special attention from FAO and its partners. I am pleased that this year, you have chosen the theme "Building on FAO's Comparative Advantage to Strengthen Partnerships for Food Security in the Pacific". This theme provides an opportunity for FAO to take a more strategic approach in designing its assistance to you.

As we are aware, the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) countries are diverse in many respects, but share common constraints that impede the achievement of a balanced economic growth and sustainable food security at both national and household levels. Most people, more than 80% in some countries, live in rural areas and rely on agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Agriculture is the dominant productive sector of most PIF countries, as the major food source and it accounts for 20-40% of GDP, over 50% of exports and 40-80% of employment. The export sector in most Pacific Island countries comprise a narrow range of primarily agricultural commodities, weak market systems and linkages, and is vulnerable to changes in international trading conditions. The need for export diversification, away from the narrow base of traditional commodities, has been acknowledged by all, as has been the need to promote intra-regional trade.

Indeed, the Regional Programme for Food Security (RPFS) in the Pacific was designed in 2002 to enable the Pacific Island countries to increase efficiency and sustainability of agriculture, to improve food security and health, to facilitate trade in agricultural products and decrease impact of natural disasters. And, today, the overall goal of the programme is to expand its current scope to improve the food security situation of the Pacific Island Forum countries by increasing the availability and access to adequate quantities of safe food products.

Support from some regional economic organizations has facilitated the smooth implementation of this project, which is also benefiting significantly from technical assistance provided by the People's Republic of China and the Philippines under the South-South Cooperation framework (4 experts for each participating country), which is considered an integral part of the project. In addition, the programme provides for consultants to be recruited to provide assistance in the areas of food quality and safety, in particular for adapting relevant legislations and regulations, strengthening the institutions, training their staff and supplying the scientific equipment for the tests and analyses. It promotes

complementarity with other on-going initiatives such as the European Union-funded “Development of Sustainable Agriculture in the Pacific” and the “Regional Trade Facilitation Programme” supported by Australia and New Zealand. In other words, ownership, cooperation and partnerships are at the core of the project.

While a number of governments have implemented food security programmes and other remedial measures, it is clear that further interventions are required to help alleviate the problems faced by smallholder farm households and rural communities. Food insecurity in the region remains a challenge and FAO, with the experience and expertise of its members states can give advice for the creation of an adequate environment aimed at ensuring access to food for the poor. It could promote sound policies for fostering income opportunities and mitigating further impacts of the changing international trade through increased agricultural productivity, competitiveness and market access.

The integration of food security policies within national and regional development plans are perhaps the most challenging tasks ahead. FAO can provide the fora where countries can come together to address these issues.

In fact, FAO is convening a Round Table on Food Security and Sustainable Development in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) during the FAO Council in November this year. It will review the progress made in implementing the decisions of the last FAO Ministerial Meeting and Mauritius Summit and chart the path for mobilizing the international community for accelerating the programmes and projects relevant to agriculture and food security.

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The on-going RPFS for the Pacific was designed with an estimated cost of US\$11.47 million, and was targeted to complement national policies and programmes, address emerging issues related to trade and regional integration and take advantage of synergies and complementarities at the regional level. As you are aware, FAO established the Trust Fund for Food Security and Food Safety with an initial target of US\$500 million to finance projects and activities aimed at contributing to the achievement of the first MDG on food security and poverty alleviation. It is within this context, and in particular thanks to the Italian government’s contribution to it, that FAO launched the RPFS for the Pacific. With its objective of building on the national development and food security policies of the Pacific Island countries, the Italian funded project is acting as a catalyst for the mobilization of further funding and donor support for the expansion of the RPFS. This represents an additional challenge today. Potential funding for the expansion phase of the programme from 2006-2010, estimated at some US\$72 million, could be sought from contributions from national budgets of the countries themselves, private sector investment, FAO Trust Funds, bilateral donors, and from credit lines or loans from international financing institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and IFAD.

To this effect, and in order to envisage the mobilization of more resources, I would like to recall the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries in Maputo, in June 2004. On this occasion, the participants adopted a declaration reconfirming agriculture, on which 62% of the ACP population depend for their livelihood and income, as the priority on which to base the economic and social development of their countries. They also took the decision to increase the portion of resources for agriculture

within the overall total allocation of the 9th European Development Fund of Euro 13.3 billion, and resolved that agricultural irrigation should benefit from the Euro one billion ACP-EU Water Facility.

In addition, and to yet mobilize more resources, parallel to FAO Regional Conferences for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Near East, and Latin America and the Caribbean, the Organization organised meetings of Ministries of Finance and of Agriculture in Johannesburg with the African Development Bank, in Beijing with the Asian Development Bank, in Doha with the Islamic Development Bank, and in Guatemala City with the Inter-American Development Bank.

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

FAO will continue to recognize the Small Island Developing States, including Pacific countries, as a special case for sustainable development and food security, and will ensure that their special needs and priorities are addressed, within the limits of available resources. FAO will thus look for information and guidance from you. I look forward to learn of the outcome of your deliberations over the next two days and wish every success to your important meeting.