Joint Statement by the United Nations Rome-based Agencies

Second Committee of the 68th UN General Assembly on Follow Up to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

21 October 2013, New York

Mr. Chairman,

It is a pleasure for me to be here on behalf of the Rome-based Agencies, WFP, FAO, and IFAD and to share our perspectives on the situation of food security and nutrition in LDCs.

In the past two decades, the global community has made great strides to reduce global hunger and meet the first Millennium Development Goal, but 842 million people still do not have enough food to lead active and healthy lives.

Progress has been uneven. While South East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean are on track to meeting the MDG goal, Sub Saharan Africa and Western Asia are not. The 2013 State of Food Insecurity in the World Report finds that the proportion of undernourished people in LDCs is 29 percent, the highest in percentage terms compared to the other group of countries. We need to accelerate progress and focus on where the need is highest.

The productive capacity of LDCs cannot be successfully enhanced without first investing in people. While investments in productive capacity are critical for growth, they can be undermined by low levels of human capital development, as long as they fail to take nutrition and access to food into account.

Of the three criteria available for graduation, two include indicators that are directly linked to food security and nutrition. The Human Assets index includes the percentage of undernourished people as an indicator. The Economic Vulnerability index includes indicators such as the instability of agricultural production and victims of natural disasters.
So we stand at a critical crossroads. To enable countries to graduate from the LDCs category, we urgently need to find solutions for LDCs’ food insecurity and malnutrition and assist countries in managing vulnerability to shocks.

The link between poverty reduction and good nutrition is not straightforward. Since the Brussels LDC conference in 2001, almost all LDCs have experienced strong per capita economic growth and have benefitted from increased levels of official development assistance. Yet, the vast majority of LDCs remain characterized by alarming levels of hunger and high vulnerability to food price volatility, environmental degradation and climate change, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations.

The Fourth UN Conference in Istanbul was key in providing an overall framework for how the global community should support agriculture, rural development, food security and good nutrition in LDCs and subsequently the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) placed special emphasis on increasing agricultural productivity, food and nutritional security and rural development.

As follow-up to the implementation of the IPoA, the Rome-based Agencies set up a Working Group on Agriculture, Food Security, Nutrition and Rural Development. The main objective of the Working Group is to contribute to the coordination, coherence, effective, and gender sensitive implementation of the Programme of Action, in the areas of agriculture, food security and nutrition and rural development.

Progress cannot be achieved without first investing in people. The future will be about our ability to come together and act on nutrition. There has been renewed commitment towards a global push to address child malnutrition in recent years including through initiatives such as the Scaling Up Nutrition. The June 2013 Lancet papers on maternal and child malnutrition stressed the importance of designing social safety nets such as cash and voucher programmes, school feeding programmes, work for assets programmes, and innovative programmes with a nutrition lens - so that they include clear nutritional objectives that will result in measurable improvements in the nutritional status of assisted populations.

LDCs have predominantly rural populations that depend on markets for their livelihoods. Improved smallholder market access will improve incomes and access to food. WFP’s Purchase for Progress (P4P) program, in collaboration with FAO and IFAD in selected locations, has been piloted in 13 LDCs and offers smallholder farmers’ opportunities to access agricultural markets and supports them to become competitive market participants. By raising smallholder farmers’ incomes, P4P turns WFP’s local procurement into a vital tool to address global hunger. The FAO and WFP initiated Purchase from Africans for Africa Programme (PAA) represents an opportunity to bring smallholder farmers into markets and is an example of what can be done in South-South and triangular cooperation in the area of food security.
It should also be mentioned that FAO hosts the Secretariat of the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) to enhance food market transparency and encourage coordination of policy action in response to market uncertainty. AMIS' initial focus is on four crops that are particularly important for the LDCs, namely wheat, maize, rice and soybeans.

Natural disasters like drought, tropical cyclones and floods, as well as soil erosion, land degradation, deforestation, bio-diversity loss, and waste management and ecosystem are a constant threat to the food security and livelihoods of smallholders, especially in LDCs where the effects of disasters are amplified by weak institutions and poor infrastructure. Increasing the resilience of local populations is crucial for food security and nutrition. WFP, OXFAM America and Swiss Re have piloted the R4 partnership initiative, referring to the four risk management strategies targeted at smallholder farmers to – 1) improve natural resource management (community risk reduction); 2) access microcredit ('prudent' risk taking); 3) gain insurance coverage (risk transfer); and 4) increase savings (risk reserves).

Overall WFP remains one of the largest UN agencies working in LDCs in terms of resources mobilized – close to 70% of operational expenses are in LDCs, amounting to US$ 2.5 billion last year. In addition, in 2012 WFP procured 684,000 metric tons of food, worth US$ 282 million in LDCs. So while we strive to address the food and nutrition needs of the most vulnerable populations in LDCs, we also seek to strengthen local markets.

In IFAD’s case, LDCs naturally fall into IFAD’s core target constituency. Since 2003, IFAD has allocated close to 49% of its total programme of loans and grants to LDCs amounting to an investment of over US$6 billion. Moreover, because of the terms of IFAD financing, the bulk of loans (87%) received by LDCs are on highly concessional terms.

Looking ahead, the context in which we are operating is changing. In addition to the food security and nutrition challenge in rural areas, there will be increasing challenges in overcrowded slums in cities. An increasing urban population will be dependent, for a large part of its food security and nutrition, on a proportionately shrinking rural population. As such, urban-rural linkages will be crucial for safeguarding food security and nutrition in future. This too should be factored into the equation as governments consider policies and investments to overcome hunger and malnutrition. Revitalization and diversification of agricultural production in LDCs are vitally important.

With strong leadership from the governments to integrate actions, the transformation that we call for can take place. Food security and nutrition have already been identified as priorities in the post-2015 development agenda. We, the Rome-based Agencies, believe that the Zero Hunger Challenge can serve as a platform to design the new agenda and spur national and regional actions in LDCs for a future with no hunger.

Thank you.