Second Committee of the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly

Agenda item 25: Agriculture Development, Food Security and Nutrition

HE Jim McLay
Permanent Representative

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Check against delivery
Mr Chairman –

New Zealand takes a keen interest in international efforts to address agricultural development, food security and nutrition; and, as a major agricultural producer, is acutely aware of both the opportunities and the challenges associated with the sustainable use of natural resources for agricultural development.

A number of delegations have already mentioned the importance of agriculture in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development. Agriculture is historically and inextricably linked to these issues and, as such, will need further consideration in the context of both the proposed sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 development agenda more generally.

Mr Chairman –

Earlier this year, the Open Working Group on the SDGs heard about the challenges in meeting the global food demand because of the projected dramatic increase in the world’s population. One response is, of course, to increase productivity but efficient use of resources is also a critical component.

The agricultural sector is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and, at a local level, that will be felt most keenly by small-holder farmers in developing countries. Our own awareness of these impacts sharply grew last summer when New Zealand experienced severe drought. And, as a small state, and as a close friend of small island states, we are also mindful of the climate change impacts on oceans and the availability of fish stocks, on which many people depend for their food and for their livelihoods.

In New Zealand’s view, by using innovation and technology alongside local knowledge, we can together work to increase productivity and to build resilience of agricultural food production systems. One way New Zealand shares its expertise in this area is through the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases, which explores how food production can be increased without growing greenhouse gas emissions; and we welcome Belgium, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Sri Lanka, which have all joined the Alliance this year, and extend an open invitation to other countries to engage in this initiative.

However, Mr Chairman, growth in food production alone will not meet increasing global demand.

An open and transparent trading environment is also vital for food security, by supporting access to and facilitation between regional and international markets. Restrictive market access barriers and high subsidies compromise the ability of farmers in all countries, but particularly those in developing countries to participate in global agricultural trade, thereby limiting their incomes and their ability to escape poverty.

Efficiency gains are also required to help answer the question of how the world will feed another two billion people in the coming decades, in a manner that is
environmentally sustainable. Earlier this year, the SDG Working Group discussed the tremendous loss and wastage of food—the FAO (2011) estimates that, globally, we waste about one third of all food produced—and that, Mr Chairman, is a downright disgrace in a world that must be fed. It's now inarguable that one way to augment the available food supply would be to do away with distortive trade measures.

At Rio+20 the international community made a commitment to eliminate harmful subsidies in the fisheries sector, and it is New Zealand’s firm expectation that countries must follow through on this promise. We are conscious that 2013 is the year by which WTO Ministers had agreed to eliminate use of export subsidies—the most harmful and trade distorting form of agricultural support. The liberalisation of agricultural trade under the WTO Doha Round remains a top priority for New Zealand and we will continue to work constructively with other member states to make progress towards this goal at the upcoming Ministerial meeting in Bali in December.

Mr Chairman—

New Zealand supports the consultative process to develop principles for responsible agricultural investments recently launched by the Committee on World Food Security. We expect that these principles will support agricultural investment in a way that is consistent with food security and sustainable development concerns. This initiative is particularly timely given the work ahead on the SDGs and post-2015 development agenda generally.

Mr Chairman—

You and your Bureau will find New Zealand to be a willing and constructive partner in this year’s discussions, and will do so with a beautifully descriptive Māori proverb in mind:

Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourouka ora ai te īwi—with your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive.

What better objective could there be, Mr Chairman than that of filling the world’s food basket?