



## TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

### **Closing Remarks of the ECOSOC President**

#### **for the Global Expert Meeting on “Agriculture and Agro-industries Development towards Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems”**

**26 April 2017, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe**

Your Excellency, Ambassador Marie Chartadova, Vice President of the ECOSOC,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

These have been two very productive days. I am unable to say whether we owe your inspiration to the topics discussed, or to the place where they were discussed.

I would like to thank the Government of Zimbabwe for hosting this meeting. My deepest appreciation also goes to our colleagues in the UN system who collaborated with the Government and with the ECOSOC in order to make this meeting a success.

I would also like to thank all of you for traveling to Victoria Falls for this meeting and for your very enthusiastic participation. You have generated rich and insightful ideas and presented thought provoking analyses regarding the complex process of developing sustainable food systems in Africa and other countries in special circumstances.

These insights will fully inform the Special Meeting on “*Innovations for Infrastructure Development and promoting Sustainable Industrialization*”, to be held on 31 May at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. I hope the level of enthusiasm you have demonstrated here will continue even as you depart from the Falls.

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

This meeting highlighted both the daunting challenges, and the unique opportunities that lie on the path to poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa and countries in special situations. It also addressed other emerging issues for further discussion around our thematic focus.

We heard a lot about the challenges we face. We heard that the upgrading of agricultural practices continues to be hindered by the insufficient integration of value chains nationally, regionally and internationally. It is also hampered by insufficient capacities; by fragmented finance; by insufficient support to small farmers, entrepreneurs, young people, women and other segments of society. Furthermore, low levels of infrastructure development prevent the development of a dynamic agricultural sector.

We also heard about how changing global dynamics bring additional stress to an already challenging situation. Indeed, climate change and natural disasters heighten agricultural losses, and agriculture – if unsustainable – can be an activity that contributes to global warming. We heard many interesting interventions about the additional burden that world population growth and urban migration places on food security. Meanwhile, the pace of global growth heightens the challenges for countries that lag behind.

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite these realities, the future is not grim. As in a land lying “fallow”, there are a myriad of opportunities present even in the challenges we have discussed. Over the past few days, your expert insights have allowed us to see these opportunities. These include opportunities to sow the benefits of new technologies; to grow agribusinesses and biotechnologies; to feed productive capacities in a sustainable manner and to reap the demographic dividend. Going forward, we can and should break down silos so as to harvest our collective capacities and turn opportunities into tangible outcomes.

We should also take concrete steps towards stimulating innovation and enhancing infrastructure development, including in the areas of transportation, energy, irrigation and ICTs so as to support the deployment of a robust agricultural and food system. Beyond boosting progress on SDGs 9 and 2, this will foster progress on SDG 1 as well as across all other goals of the 2030 Agenda.

In order to achieve this ambitious roadmap, we will need to all work together. The spirit of partnership reflected in this meeting is encouraging. Representatives from each of the key sectors – public, private, civil society – from around the world have been plowing the same land throughout this initiative, and the results look promising. I am particularly encouraged by the committed cooperation between all the different UN entities involved in the organization and preparation of this event, as well as the wider Special Meeting to which it will contribute.

I hope that we can continue this collaboration. I urge you to not hesitate in staying engaged with us. Keep communicating any further insights you may have on innovative initiatives that reinforce the potential of agriculture and agro-industries, to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

This meeting has urged us to go beyond past and current models, beyond individual areas of expertise, beyond separate locations and beyond institutional frontiers. In doing so, we can unleash the full potential of infrastructure development and sustainable industrialization, including agro-industries, to generate growth and employment while preserving planetary boundaries.

In addition to the global commitments contained in the 2030 Agenda, the Addis-Ababa Action Agenda, the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the New Urban Agenda, numerous initiatives have been launched and there is a lot of work happening on the ground by those of you working in your respective institutions and businesses.

Many of you shared personal examples that demonstrated you are ahead of the curve, whether it is through the roll-out of new technologies to improve agricultural productivity and sustainability, or national programmes to enhance smallholder production and value chain development. In fact, one of the messages we heard from many participants was to use the building blocks already in place to scale up progress on agriculture and agro-industries.

Regional integration is one of the key areas for building on progress already achieved. We heard interesting presentations on the status of the Continental Free Trade Agreement in Africa, and related integration initiatives. Setting deadlines – which can be used to promote accountability and to monitor progress on a regular basis – is important.

Among other initiatives is the 3ADI. The 3ADI, or African Agribusiness and Agro-industries Development Initiative, was developed in 2010 by FAO, IFAD, UNIDO along with the African Union Commission, the AfDB and UNECA to reinforce agribusinesses and agro-industries. The initiative generated a number of useful insights and learning experiences that could have useful implications for countries' pursuit of the SDGs, including through agro-industries development.

I look forward to hearing further about how such initiatives could be further scaled up. Working with partners, the objective of the Special Meeting next month will be to water the seeds planted through initiatives that have positively demonstrated their potential.

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Distinguished guests,

There is still much more discussion to come on these and other ideas. However, our time in Victoria Falls has come to a close.

As the main coordination and guiding body of the United Nations system, ECOSOC is fully ready to support and endorse concrete and productive initiatives that will be launched in New York in May.

I thank you for your participation, and wish you a safe flight home, where I hope you will continue to share your ideas on these questions.