

Keynote Speech

Support Small Scale Asian Family Farmers for Food Security, Nutrition and Poverty Eradication

by

**Ms Estrella Penunia
Secretary General**

Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA)

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Your Royal Highness,

Your Excellency, Mr Petipong Puengbun Na Ayudhya
Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Royal Thai Government

Mr. Hiroyuki Konuma
United Nations Assistant Director-General and FAO Regional Representative,

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I bring warm greetings from my organization, Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development.

The United Nations has declared this year 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming, so it is just very fitting that this year's World Food Day carries the same IYFF theme of "feeding the world, caring for the earth." It is indeed a great honor to be invited to address the celebration of this year's World Food Day by the Regional Office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations here in Bangkok. While I consider it as my duty as Special Ambassador for IYFF, this is also a great opportunity, in behalf of our member and partner farmers' organizations, to dialogue with you about family farming in the region.

Many of the farmers in our region are family farmers. In fact, today there are more than 570 million farms in the world and more than 500 million of these are owned by families. Worldwide, 475 million farms are less than 2 hectares and more than 410 million farms are less than 1 hectare in size. A large majority – around eighty seven percent (87%) - of family farms that are less than two hectares are found in Asia Pacific. Thus, small scale farming, of two hectares or less, is the predominant mode of agriculture production in the world, and here in our Asia Pacific region, we have the most number of small-scale family farmers.

The IYFF theme focuses on two important roles of family farmers. One is on food security – "feeding the world". Family farmers in our region produce 80% of our region's food, in spite

of our small landholdings. While the big number of family farmers in the region can be a factor for this, it is also because many of us practice integrated, diversified, multi cropping farming systems. In a 1-2 hectare farm, a family farmer can grow rice/corn/wheat/millet, different kinds of vegetables, fruits and grasses, and raise livestock such as chicken, yak, cows, pigs, goats, ducks, geese, and fish and get animal products such as milk, manure, leather and wool. In the Philippines, we have a song, "Bahay Kubo", or The Nipa Hut, where it says that even if our hut is small, you can find variety of vegetables, fruits and spices around it.

Nutritionists now increasingly insist on the need for more diverse agro-ecosystems; and in this area family farmers clearly can contribute more. My first eight years of work in the rural areas were of organizing mothers into mothers' classes and clubs, conducting health and nutrition classes, making kitchen gardens, having feeding and weighing programs, teaching them on primary health care, encouraging breastfeeding and forming savings and credit groups. Our work has become an inspiration for the government back then to implement at national level a community-based primary health care program.

The second phrase of the IYFF theme highlights the role of family farmers in sustainable production – "caring for the earth". Climate change is real to us . We know that chemical intensive, mono-cropping and industrial agriculture is one of its leading causes. As we are highly vulnerable and affected by it, there is a tremendous call to shift to farming systems that can adapt to climate change while mitigating it at the same time. Our response to this challenge is to massively promote agro-ecological approaches - sustainable, integrated, diversified, organic, low-input, natural agriculture – as these practices enrich the soil, manage water resources, improve species and genetic diversity, reduce losses and costs. Family farmers will be in a better position to practice agro ecology. We live on or near our farms, and strive to preserve surrounding environment for future generations. Also, we have been developing our own culture of coexistence with the environment that surrounds us since the beginning of humankind, like the ingenious rice-fish system in Zhejiang province in China and the Banaue rice terraces in Ifugao, Philippines. As you may know also, the Philippines was struck by Typhoon Haiyan last year, but now in affected farming communities we work with, family farmers have started to plant root crops and short term vegetables in their farms as well as in plastic containers right in their homes. This Vertical container gardening has one time water application, with natural fertilizer, garden soil and vermicast inside re-used soft drinks bottles.

However, millions of family farmers are poor and hungry. Out of the 800 million hungry people in the world, two thirds or 533 million are in our region, mainly in South Asia, and many of them rely on agriculture and fisheries for a living.

Why are we poor? Farmers from various consultations cite the following: Many of us do not have secured rights over the lands, the waters, and the forests we live on. This is aggravated by growing large-scale land acquisitions by private companies, sometimes offering quick, hard-to-resist money in exchange of lands, or worse, grabbing our lands. Good seeds are not readily available and affordable, and are beginning to be out of our control. We do not have the capital for our production inputs and tools, and find it hard to get credits and loans. Furthermore, we have high input costs. Sometimes we find it difficult to sell in the market because of bad roads, or to know where the market is because of poor market information or to command good prices for our produce because it is of lower quality or the market has too much of it already. And now with globalized trade - unfair trade rules, and large-scale land acquisitions. In this knowledge and digital age, we are still information poor. Women farmers are particularly disadvantaged as they are affected by socially constructed roles that inhibit participation in decision-making processes. Because of the massive poverty in the rural areas, many rural people migrate to cities within and outside their countries; many of the youth are not attracted to farming and only farm as a last resort.

What types of policies might help farmers escape poverty?

The first are policies on agrarian and aquatic reforms, those that secure rights to lands, waters and forests by family farmers. We note for example how the distribution of state-owned lands in Vietnam to farming households has helped Vietnamese farmers produce more crops and earn more in the process. Governments can implement the Voluntary Guidelines on responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests, take relevant measures to improve cooperation and governance in the management of common property resources. Women's rights to land and natural resources must be strengthened.

The second are policies that invest in public goods in the rural areas –roads, communication, electricity, irrigation, health, water, sanitation, weather forecasting, disaster preparedness and management. Our labor force is our first and foremost asset; we want to have healthy bodies, minds and relationships.

The third are policies that help massively promote agro-ecology. Studies show that integrated and diversified farming can increase yields from 20-60%. We can promote this by giving the proper incentives, financing – such as low interest credit, crop and weather insurance, training, local seed banks, extension and research through in-situ farms, where farmers and professional agriculture researchers and extensionists collaborate closely. We have many examples of integrated farming such as rice-duck, rice-free range chicken, pig, goat -fish-banana –vermi systems in a hectare of land.

The fourth are policies that promote farmer-owned, farmer managed agro enterprises, mainly through their cooperatives or joint business ventures, which strengthen family farmers' participation in the value chain and access with domestic and international markets. We need regulations to ensure fair sharing of risks and benefits in contract growing and other supply and marketing arrangements, as well as starter funds, special credit windows, a system of tax incentives, support for storage and post harvest facilities, and various capacity building activities to strengthen the entrepreneurship spirit and business skills of farmers and build their agro-processing skills. We note the success of our members in Indonesia and Cambodia who have successfully marketed organic rice to Europe and USA respectively. We also note the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy and the New Theory of His Majesty the King of Thailand and are happy to see that farmers in various parts of the country are putting this into practice. Also, as many countries are into global trade and global trade rules, we ask for macro trade policies that promote food as a basic right, promote a just and fair trade, and that promote the livelihoods of small scale family farmers, rather than threatening their displacement.

The fifth are policies that promote gender equality. Women farmers comprise at least half of the farming population in Asia, and with the migration of men farmers in the cities – such as what is happening in many South Asian rural areas – do as much as 80% of farming work. Yet, women farmers are hardly recognized as farmers. In some countries, they are not given farmers' identity cards, the technologies are not appropriate and are not responsive to their needs, and their cultures and traditions prevent them to travel far for trainings and meetings and to speak in public. We note the policy of the Nepalese and Philippine governments to issue land certificates to the names of both the husband and the wife.

The sixth are policies that attract the youth in agriculture. AFA just had a consultation on this topic and we are happy to note that Japan and South Korea have programs and incentives already to attract the youth in agriculture, providing small grants and loans for start-up farm activities, as well as training from "master farmers" from farmers organizations.

Last but definitely not the least, are policies that promote the significant involvement of

farmers and their organizations in policy-making processes of governments. We look forward to your support to MTCP2, a five year program supported by IFAD, Swiss Development Cooperation, EU with FAO as Technical Assistance Provider. The MTCP2 aims to strengthen the capacities of farmers organizations to deliver services to their members and to engage in effective policy dialogues with governments. Moreover, farmer leaders all over the world issued an Abu Dhabi declaration in January 2014 , and we hope to dialogue with governments on this.

We all know that we will need a doctor once in a while, a lawyer hopefully never or just once, but a farmer we will need three times a day. No farmer, no food. And food is a basic right. Thus, for food security and nutrition, for eradicating hunger and poverty, for a sustainable, ecological and resilient agriculture, investments for and with small-scale family farmers in the region through enabling policies and programs are definitely an imperative.

We know that many policies and programs may take more than a year to discuss, debate, enact and implement. Though we have wished that for this year, each government can enact or implement well at least one important policy or program, so that we can really feel that this is our year – and that we are being specially cared for and treated well. We still have two and a half months to lobby for that. We hope you can help us liaise with your country offices on this. But we know that this year will just be a beginning. As we appreciate the role of family farmers we can look more into the construction of a more enabling policy environment that truly invests in family farmers. We hope we can enter into effective policy dialogues. Moreover, we hope you can support us in calling for a declaration of an International Decade of Family Farming and an International Day of Family Farmers to sustain this momentum of policy dialogues that will really bring dignified, decent lives to millions of small scale family farmers in Asia and Pacific.

Thank you for your attention.