

**Opening Remarks by Mr. S. Pushpanathan, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Economic Community at the ASEAN-FAO Regional Conference on Food Security  
Bangkok, 27-28 May 2009**

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H.E. Theera Wongsamut, Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand

Honourable Dr. He Changchui, Assistant Director General & Regional Representative, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Distinguished Delegates from ASEAN Plus Three Countries and Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

It is an honour and privilege for me to welcome all of you to the opening of the ASEAN-FAO Regional Conference on Food Security. On behalf of the ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Secretariat, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation to FAO for co-organising with us this important conference to explore the possibility for cooperation and collaboration among concerned parties in strengthening food security and improving the livelihood of farmers in the region.

As you may be well aware, the ASEAN Member States together with their Plus Three Partners of China, Japan and South Korea have been working closely to expedite economic development and regional integration supporting the community building efforts of ASEAN. In this regard, food security continues to be a high priority at the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) and the AMAF Plus Three meetings.

In the last three years, we witnessed a high degree of uncertainty in the global economy. This started first with the high fuel cost, then the soaring food price which was followed by the subprime fallout, global financial crisis and now global economic recession. The 3Fs crisis of fuel, food and financial as it has been termed did put a heavy strain on many developed and developing countries, including ASEAN.

Although it is hard to predict the actual socio-economic impact on ASEAN, particularly to the food and agriculture sectors, it is however crucial for ASEAN Member States, their Plus Three partners and the FAO to revisit the current policies and priority issues related to food and agriculture, particularly food security. This will help to establish a common ground of understanding and identify short-to-medium term preparatory responses to mitigate any possible impact in the course of ensuring long-term food security and sustainable food trade in the region.

**ASEAN Cooperation to Strengthen Food Security**

Agriculture remains an important economic contributor to most ASEAN economies. ASEAN cooperation in food, agriculture and forestry has been focussed on the enhancement of food and agricultural production, improvement of farmers' livelihood, promotion of agriculture investment and creating conducive market and fair trade. This has

been echoed in various ASEAN strategic policies and work programmes, including those under the AMAF and AMAF Plus Three processes. This is in line with the general trend of our trade facilitation endeavours as part of the building of a Single Market and Production Base under the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015.

Let me emphasise again that food security is a major concern in ASEAN and is an important goal of ASEAN cooperation. Various initiatives are being pursued to support this key goal of food security. ASEAN Member States are working together under the ASEAN Food Security Reserve (AFSR) Agreement to share rice stocks at times of shortage, particularly through the trigger of a collective response under the ASEAN Emergency Rice Reserve (AERR). In order to improve and further support the operation of the AERR, a Pilot Project of East Asia Emergency Rice Reserve (EAERR) is being implemented. The EAERR Pilot Project is an ASEAN Plus Three initiative to expand ASEAN food security cooperation activities with our Plus Three Countries.

Besides AFSR and EAERR, the ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS) has also been developed as an AMAF Plus Three initiative to expand the ASEAN food security cooperative activities with our Plus Three partners. The objectives and activities of AFSIS are to establish an information network on food security among the countries and to conduct trainings in data collection and management.

As a pragmatic approach to addressing issues of rising food price, particularly in the year 2007/2008, an ASEAN Integrated Food Security (AIFS) Framework and Strategic Plan of Action on ASEAN Food Security (SPA-FS) has been developed and endorsed by the 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting of AMAF held on 23 October 2008 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam with the main goal of ensuring long-term food security and to improve the livelihoods of farmers in the ASEAN region.

The AIFS Framework and its detailed SPA-FS are regarded as crucial and timely considering the importance of food security in the process of the community building in ASEAN and the current global financial and economic crisis. Towards this end, the 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit held in February 2009 in Thailand adopted the AIFS/SPA-FS and issued a statement to encourage partnership with concerned institutions and agencies, dialogue partners and international organisations to pursue this important endeavour.

It should be noted that the AIFS and SPA-FS are compatible and consistent with the Comprehensive Framework of Action of the UN High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis (HLTF-CFA). Hence, ASEAN and UN have agreed to work together in a cohesive manner in strengthening food security at the ASEAN and global level, and to ensure effective implementation. Towards this end, a Convergence Matrix of Strategic Plan of Action on Food Security of the ASEAN Region with the UN and Other Partner Agencies has been formulated at the ASEAN-UN Meeting on Food Security held last November in Manila, which will help facilitate the identification of joint ASEAN-UN activities and other possible cooperation at this conference.

## **Conclusion**

In concluding my remarks, I would like to reiterate that food security and the issues related to food trade are of importance to all ASEAN Member States. It is a serious concern and has impact on a wider population as the issues involve various levels of stakeholders in ASEAN Member States. The problems on balancing agricultural production-supply due to instability of food prices in the global market in the past two years have posed a great challenge to ASEAN.

At the same time, the situation certainly has provided an urgent signal to ASEAN to enhance its investment and improve its food productivity to help address food situations at domestic and international markets in the longer-term. Toward this end, concerted efforts and enhanced collaboration and partnership on food security for sustainable economic growth is imperative and should be given increased attention especially in the light of the episodes of food price volatilities and impact of current global financial and economic slowdown.

I wish to convey again my profound appreciation to H.E. Theera Wongsamut, Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand for his kind presence and the FAO for co-organising this conference. My special thanks also go to Dr. He Changchui for his continued support to ASEAN in the food and agriculture sectors. Last but not least, I would like to convey my sincere appreciation to all the delegates taking their valuable time to participate in this important conference.

I wish all of you a productive meeting and good outcomes.

Thank you.

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