

**44th Session of the Governing Council, International Fund for Agricultural Development
(IFAD)**

General Statement by Canada

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Mr. President, Mr. Chairman, Governors, and Distinguished Guests,

It is my honour to present this national statement on behalf of the Government of Canada to the 44th Session of the Board of Governors of the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

As we reflect on how different the world looked when this Governing Council last convened – in-person – in February 2020, we are reminded of the precariousness of human and planetary health. Over the past twelve months, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on rural areas, and on agriculture and food systems in all of our countries. We now have much greater challenges than we did a year ago in recovering, rebuilding, and ensuring resilient rural development.

The theme of this year’s Governing Council meeting -- Rural Development: a Prerequisite for Global Resilience – underlines the urgency of strengthening the foundations on which our communities and broader society are constructed, so that they can better withstand and recover from future shocks. COVID-19 has rapidly deepened global poverty, exacerbated inequality, and exposed the weak points in our food systems. The pandemic has potentially reversed decades of progress. The effects of climate change, including extreme and erratic weather and new pests and diseases, threaten our agriculture and food systems, and the health and livelihoods of the poorest and most vulnerable people. We are off track to realize the Sustainable Development Goals of ending hunger and poverty by 2030, and the commitment to leave no one behind.

As we strive to build back better, it is becoming increasingly urgent to strengthen our support for sustainable agriculture and rural development, including building resilient food systems and improving the opportunities and well-being of rural people. In all countries, Canada included, we rely on healthy, vibrant, resilient, and productive rural areas to provide us with sufficient, affordable, and nutritious food. Sustainable agriculture and rural development, which are still responsible for the vast majority of rural jobs in developing countries, have the potential to play an important role in environmental and natural resource conservation, as well as in climate change mitigation.

These common challenges demand our collective efforts. Only together can we lay truly resilient foundations and make the investments needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. As we recover and begin to rebuild, we offer four proposals to guide our efforts:

Reaffirm our Commitment to Advancing the SDGs. While the global economy remains fragile, it is precisely at this time that we should step up together to accelerate SDG progress,

including through increased investments in the recovery, rebuilding and resilience of rural communities in developing countries, which we know have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. To that end, we should continue to work with IFAD as a preferred partner because of its strong comparative advantage in reaching and working with the poorest and the most marginalized groups in the most fragile and remote areas, especially poor rural women who make up the majority of the agricultural labour force.

Foster More Diverse, Inclusive and Sustainable Partnerships. Partnerships are fundamental to building rural communities and global resilience, particularly through the transformational potential of sustainable agriculture and rural development. Global partnerships – including the coordinated work of the Rome-based agencies in response to the pandemic – are key to mobilizing governments, the private sector and civil society to devote more resources to achieving the SDGs. In particular, partnerships with the private sector which foster inclusive business models can provide more opportunities to smallholder farmers and rural communities in terms of capacity-building, employment, women’s empowerment and strengthened resilience to climate change. Partnerships have been crucial to delivering a global collective response to the COVID-19 crisis which, while not perfect, is significantly more effective than any one member state acting on its own. Canada believes that to accelerate SDG progress, we must actively foster truly inclusive partnerships that empower smallholder farmers, and particularly women, youth, and Indigenous people. Their knowledge, perspective, creativity and energy will make a significant contribution to the innovations needed to achieve the SDGs.

Fostering and Scaling Up Innovation. Transforming food systems to achieve nature-positive, resilient rural development demands innovation. However, innovation alone is insufficient; we need to scale up innovation to make a real impact in a short timeframe. IFAD is uniquely positioned to scale up innovations in rural areas, particularly with smallholder farmers. IFAD is also well-placed to foster innovations – or local adaptations of innovations – by smallholder farmers themselves. We know that local-led solutions and actions are generally more effective in strengthening resilience to climate change, combating deforestation, reversing biodiversity loss and mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. IFAD has decades of experience implementing innovative community-driven approaches to engage local people in its operations. We are therefore pleased that IFAD’s Twelfth Replenishment sets ambitious expectations, but preserves for IFAD the flexibility needed to respond creatively to local initiative and put the right tools in the hands of local partners, including smallholder farmers themselves, to scale up innovations on their terms. An increase in resources for the Twelfth Replenishment, combined with new tools and partnerships, equip IFAD for big impact through innovation.

Accelerate Nature-positive Action. 2021 is shaping up to be a watershed year for climate, biodiversity, and land restoration. The momentum is building for real action, and smallholder farmers and rural entrepreneurs have an important role to play in these efforts. They are on the front line, immediately facing the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation, but also best positioned to respond with climate-smart and nature-positive agricultural approaches. We need to ensure that rural communities can access the knowledge and resources they need to become more climate resilient. Yet, although we are reaching record global levels of climate finance, only an estimated two percent reaches smallholder farmers. With a more ambitious agenda for climate action in the Twelfth Replenishment period, and a

commitment to develop a policy on biodiversity, IFAD can become a leader in climate-smart agriculture. Canada has been pleased to provide significant and ongoing support to these efforts.

As IFAD embarks on an ambitious Twelfth Replenishment period, Canada sees in IFAD a key partner for achieving the SDGs. We commend IFAD's higher ambition on climate action and gender equality, and increased efforts on biodiversity. We also welcome IFAD's greater focus on Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and youth. We hope to see greater attention on a rights-based approach, in particular, the intersection between women's rights and climate adaptation, as the pathway for a more sustainable, equitable climate-resilient future for rural areas. In addition, we encourage more innovative approaches that harness local knowledge and research for solutions that can be scaled up. As always, we trust IFAD to put local agency and empowerment – particularly for women – at the heart of its work.

As we reach the end of the Eleventh Replenishment Period and begin the Twelfth, IFAD is well positioned to accelerate SDG achievement for the rural poor. As Governors of IFAD member states, we should be proud of IFAD's successful reforms, designed fundamentally to scale up impact. We should be confident that IFAD and its membership maintain the ambition to do more and to do better in achieving the SDGs and building rural resilience.

On behalf of Canada, we reaffirm our strong commitment to IFAD, to investing in rural resilience, and to improving the lives and opportunities of the women and men in developing countries who are most affected by poverty.