

The Chairperson of the Forty-sixth Governing Council

Honourable Colleague Members of the Governing Council

The President of IFAD, Your Excellency Alvario LARIO

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to lead The Gambia's delegation to the forty-sixth session of the Governing Council, my first attendance since my appointment as The Gambia's Minister of Agriculture and convenor of our national food systems. Our presence today is testimony to the excellent relations between The Gambia and IFAD, which go back several decades, and has resulted in a total of 12 agriculture and natural resource programs and projects, dating back to the 1980s. In fact, the total investment support rendered by IFAD to the Government and People of The Gambia stands at an impressive US\$ 113.53 million, impacting on almost 200,000 households and counting.

IFAD is currently funding the biggest agricultural project in The Gambia, the ROOTS Project, which was launched two years ago by His Excellency President of the republic Adama Barrow, as a result of the strategic national significance of the Project. The ROOTS project aims to Increase agricultural productivity and access to markets for enhanced food security, nutrition, and resilience of family farms and farmer organizations in The Gambia.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Before going further, please allow me to congratulate the Chair of the forty-sixth Governing Council, and to assure him of The Gambia's unalloyed support and cooperation.

Let me also take the opportunity to convey special congratulations, on behalf of the Government and People of The Gambia, to the new President of IFAD, His Excellency Alvaro LARIO, on his assumption of the reins of leadership of IFAD. As a long-standing staff member of IFAD, we believe your appointment signals stability, continuity, and yet change in view of today's world realities.

Finally, let me extend our congratulations to the new Regional Director for West and Central Africa, who is replacing my compatriot Mr. Sana Jatta, who has served IFAD in various capacities across the globe for more than three decades. We look forward to working with Mr. Bernard HIEN, in particular to increase The Gambia's share of the portfolio resource allocation for the Region.

Before concluding, let me quickly turn to the theme of the 46th Governing Council, i.e. Mainstreaming Youth: Accelerating Action for Food Security.

For The Gambia, this theme is particularly apt because of The Gambia's youth bulge, as is the case with many developing countries, with youth in The Gambia constituting more than two thirds of our current population. At the National Level, The Gambia's National Development Plan places a lot of emphasis on providing opportunities for the youth, and mainstreaming them in national development activities, particularly in the agricultural sector. Efforts to Accelerate Action for Food Security could not also have come at a better time, given the economic and food security challenges brought upon us firstly by the COVID Pandemic, and now the war in Ukraine. As a result of these, fertilizer prices in The Gambia have more

than doubled, rendering smallholder farmers vulnerable and unable to maximize their production potential, in turn directly impacting on the Gambia's macroeconomic performance indicators.

We therefore look forward to the continued cooperation and partnership with IFAD to tackle The Gambia's food security challenges, with special focus on youth and rural women, in a climate smart and environmentally sustainable manner coupled with increase presence of the private sector. IFAD's continued support would be particularly welcome at the policy, program, and operational levels, to increase productivity and commercialization along the rice and vegetable value chains.

I thank you for your kind attention, and look forward to a successful forty-sixth session of our Governing Council.

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