

WELCOME REMARKS

Delivered by Undersecretary Gerundio Madueño

**Thematic Dialogue:
New Challenges and Options for Revitalizing Rural Communities**

January 10, 2006

The honorable representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization headed by Mr. Jain, Mr. Jun David, our national expert, Mr. Conrado Navarro of PRRM, Dr. Alex Brillantes of UP NCPAG, Asec. Austere Panadero of DILG, my friend Chelly Ponce, and of course, from Rome we have Noel de Luna of the ICARRD Steering Committee Chair from the Philippines and we have Jing dela Rosa of the ICARRD Secretariat. Distinguished participants of this very important event, our beloved partners from the government, the academe and the civil society organizations, other stakeholders, my fellow workers in government, friends, ladies and gentlemen, a pleasant, good morning.

It is indeed a privilege for the Department of Agrarian Reform to welcome you all to this thematic dialogue, entitled "The Challenges and Options for Revitalizing Rural Communities, a gathering of experts that continuously work for the upliftment of the living conditions of our people in the rural communities. Let me enlighten you that agrarian reform is not only limited to land tenure improvements, agrarian justice delivery and program beneficiaries development but, it also includes gender program to ensure women participation in access to land, agricultural production, and non-farm income-generating activities. It also recognizes ancestral rights in cultural territory of our indigenous people.

In this dialogue, we look forward to a stimulating and productive exchange of ideas among all the participants and optimistically, come up with a more broad-based integrated development strategy paper that will be part of the presentation to the forthcoming "International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development this March 2006. We hope that we will be able to propose joint actions and identify mechanisms for collaboration, best policies and practices for improving access to land and new strategies for poverty alleviation in view of the threats brought by globalization, trade liberalization, industrialization, urbanization and increasing migration of our youth from the rural areas to the urban centers.

Let me update you also with the achievements of the CARP or the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program under the Department of Agrarian Reform. As the lead agency, we distributed about 3 million ha of land to almost 2 million agrarian reform beneficiaries. In the 1,704 agrarian reform communities and 40 KARZones or KALAHI Agrarian Reform Zones involving 9,580 barangays nationwide. The agrarian reform program significantly contributed to the reduction of poverty incidence in the country. Among these beneficiaries, there has been a decline in the incidence of poverty from 47.6% in 1990 to 45.2% in 2000.

We are proud to say that with the 16 on-going foreign-assisted projects we continue to expand the support services to the agrarian reform beneficiaries beyond Land tenure improvement and the agrarian justice delivery. We have also provided infrastructure services such as farm-to-market road, irrigation systems, post harvest facilities including basic services like potable water, solar power, health centers and education facilities. To date, the Department of Agrarian Reform was able to generate about P42 billion from all the funds from various international funding institutions including the FAO and UNDP.

Agrarian reform, through the gender program ensures women participation in access to land, agricultural production and non-farm, income-generating activities. In recognition of the ancestral rights and cultural territory, the indigenous peoples (IPs) in Cordilleras are also agrarian reform beneficiaries.

We at the Department of Agrarian Reform still acknowledge that there are other equally important issues and concerns that need to be addressed in order to mitigate the severity of poverty in this sector.

Needless to say, our vision is the same. We should like to see this as an important learning event, and we would like to see our vision coming together in the ICARRD and in this thematic dialogue process. I hope that we will be able to propose joint actions and identify mechanisms for collaboration, best policies and practices for improving access to land and new strategies for poverty alleviation in view of the threats brought by globalization, trade liberalization, industrialization, urbanization and increasing migration of our youth from the rural areas to the urban centers.

We are all aware that the issues of the Millennium Development Goals have been put forward by the agrarian reform program in support of the rally call of the administration to address the needs of the vulnerable sector.

Towards this end, we assure you of our commitment to complete the distribution of the remaining about 700,000 ha of land by 2008. With your generous support, we will continue to deliver the necessary development interventions to our farmer beneficiaries in the agrarian reform communities and in the KARZones, to extend our intervention to non-agrarian reform communities beyond ARCs and KARZones.

To further expand our coverage, we joined together with the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources under the convergence initiatives to cover the development of coastal lowland and upland farm areas.

One of the venues to thresh out the suitable paradigms for the rural development is through this dialogue. With the theme focusing on the new challenges and options to revitalize rural communities, I am confident that the important issues on employment opportunities, agricultural productivity and sustainability, livelihood programs, and rural development will be given emphasis.

On that note, let me congratulate the FAO for spearheading this dialogue. We also like to extend our gratitude towards NGOs, the academe and other stakeholders, whose faith in this country and commitment in the agrarian reform program remain resolute and intact. Let me thank you in advance, the presenters, discussants, and reactors who are going to share important information with us in this dialogue.

On behalf of Secretary Nasser C. Pangandaman, let me welcome you all as we continue to undertake rural development in the countryside through agrarian reform.

Mabuhay and Happy New Year!

KEYNOTE ADDRESS¹

By

Ramesh C.A. Jain
FAO Representative

Undersecretary Gerundio Madueño of DAR
Asst. Secretary Austere Panadero of the Department of Interior and Local Government
Asst. Secretary Dolores de Quiros-Castillo of the National Anti-Poverty Commission
Mr. Noel de Luna, Deputy Permanent Representative to FAO, Philippine Embassy, Rome
Ms. Rosalud dela Rosa from the FAO/ICARRD Secretariat
Distinguished Representatives of Donor Agencies
Participants from Civil Society, Government, Private Sector and the Academe
Ladies and Gentlemen

The first responsibility of any nation is to ensure the food security of its people. The sad truth however is that within every society, rich and poor, there are children too hungry to concentrate in school, underweight mothers who give birth to sickly children, and chronically hungry adults who lack the energy to pursue their productive life. Where hunger is widespread, it is also a basic development issue impeding national economic growth, and keeping millions trapped in poverty.

Knowing that food insecurity, poverty and inequality are the most crucial and persistent problems facing humanity today, we would all agree that their alleviation or reduction should be at the heart of any meaningful development effort. This concern is heightened by the realization that progress towards the elimination of poverty and food insecurity has generally been far from satisfactory, and diverges sharply from the agreed commitments and targets established by various international conferences in the course of the last several years.

FAO estimates that there are still about 792 million people in 98 developing nations, who are not getting enough food to lead normal, healthy and active lives. In the first half of the decade of the 21st century, a group of only 37 countries achieved reductions of 100 million in the number of undernourished. Across the rest of the developing world, the number of hungry people actually increased by almost 60 million. What is even more worrying if the pace is not stepped up, is that more than 600 million people will still go to sleep hungry in the developing countries in 2015.

The international development experience has clearly brought out the fact that sustainable food security is not just an abstract concept. It has been the experience in several developing countries that the household food and nutritional security of rural communities can be effectively achieved by augmenting local production by the resource-poor farmers. The successful land-to-the-tillers programme in post-war Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, as well as the household tenurial system that followed break-up of the collective farms in Mainland China and Vietnam, greatly reduced extreme rural poverty and hunger in these countries.

In any nation's quest for poverty reduction, food security and sustainability, key roles are played by policy reforms and institutions. No matter how good the quality of land, poverty cannot be addressed effectively if a perverse set of policies keeps people from meeting their potentials, and effectively keeps them from taking advantage of opportunities to better themselves economically. The poor in marginal areas are not

¹ Delivered at the opening of the "Thematic Dialogue: New Challenges and Options for Revitalizing Rural Communities" held on 10 January 2006, at SEAMEO, Innotech, Quezon City

poor only because of the biophysical quality of their land resources. In fact, in many such areas, there are large pockets of land that are of quite good quality for agricultural production; but institutional or policy barriers deny the poor farmers access to productive assets like land, water and other farming resources.

Against this backdrop, I would like to underline the central role of agriculture and rural development in our efforts to ensure sustainable development and eradicate hunger and poverty. The centrality of agriculture was recognized by Governments and the international community at the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development held 25 years ago. Since 1979, calls have repeatedly been made to help the poor gain secure access to land and to farming resources such as technology, credit, inputs and markets. Without genuine land reform, the chances of benefits reaching the rural poor through civil society or government assistance in many countries seem dim because social structure often impedes best efforts to serve small farmers. Only through ownership of land are farmers empowered to invest time and resources in asset improvement and gain access to agricultural support services.

ICARRD provides an excellent opportunity to evaluate international and national experiences in improving poor, landless farmers' access to means of production, primarily land and water. Processes of agrarian reform have been implemented in many countries: some have succeeded, some have failed. But for millions of poor farmers, secure land access is still far from becoming a reality. The ICARRD process will also enable us to explore innovative concepts such as developing land lease markets, contract farming, cooperatives, land share producer companies and distribution of homestead-cum-garden plots to the landless for harnessing the productive potential of the poor and landless to improve their incomes and food and nutritional security of their families.

The Bipartisan House Committee report accompanying the recent US Millennium Challenge Act has underlined the importance of land needs of the rural poor, stating "The Committee believes that ownership by the poor of a plot of land at least sufficient to erect basic shelter and have a garden producing food and income is of fundamental importance for empowerment, livelihood, social stability and the creation of wealth." Similarly there are important new "second generation" efforts being made to recognize and address the importance of land rights in reducing and ultimately eradicating substantial rural poverty in India, Indonesia and China.

The time has come for a renewed commitment to agrarian reform and rural development, through the identification of new challenges and options for revitalizing rural communities. This is fundamental if we are to achieve the goal of reducing by half the number of poor and hungry people by 2015, as set out by the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Many food-insecure people live in rural areas, where they are dependent on agriculture and related industries for their livelihoods. Debt relief can spur progress towards reducing hunger, provided the resources freed up are used, not only to feed the hungry now, but also to put communities on to a longer-term path of sustainable development by investing in food security. Creating sustainable productivity improvements and building on the strengths of community action, constitute a way forward that will benefit the poor in the countryside as well as in the cities. FAO works to ensure enabling environments, which actively encourage the growth of rural enterprise, and an entrepreneurial spirit for the generation of incomes and employment, while ensuring an efficient and effective safety net for the poor and protection of the natural resource base.

The participants in this dialogue are a diverse group, coming from different sectors of society and from different regions in the country, serving different communities and clienteles. We are however all united by a shared commitment: to reduce food insecurity and its causes rooted in poverty through rural development.

Sixty years of accumulated development experience has taught us that sustainability, self-sufficiency and a sense of self-worth all demand that the poor have at least a minimum endowment of productive assets like land and capital. Inclusion of access to such farming resources is at the heart of any practical plan for sharply reducing global poverty and hunger.

The ICARRD process of sharing experiences and forging new international partnerships on agrarian reform and sustainable rural development will strengthen our combined will to adopt best policies and practices in empowering the resource-poor farmers of the world to achieve food security and to improve their standards of living. We here in the Philippines must set our priorities in achieving the goals and objectives of ICARRD.

Salamat po at magandang umaga sa inyong lahat. (Thank you and good morning to all.)