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## **Opening Statement by President Gilbert F. Houngbo**

Executive Board — 134<sup>th</sup> Session  
Rome, 13-16 December 2021

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For: **Information**

## Opening Statement by President Gilbert F. Houngbo

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to our final Board meeting of 2021, and of the IFAD11 period.

We have a number of important matters to discuss. This is quite a critical Board. When we consider the context and the challenges ahead – whether climate change, COVID or recovery from conflict – the ability of poor rural people to adapt and to be resilient is essential.

The nexus between food security, poverty and peace leaves us with no doubt that action must be scaled up.

It is the reason we committed to doubling impact by 2030, while at the same time not undermining our financial stability and sustainability.

Looking back at the IFAD12 Consultation, despite the very challenging environment core contributions reached a record level thanks to all your support.

Pledges have continued to come in through the year – confirming our Membership's commitment to small-scale producers and rural people in general.

To date, IFAD has received 90 pledges, plus a special contribution from the Holy See, for a total of US\$1.17 billion, equivalent to around 75 per cent of the replenishment target.

Many Member States have made significant increases in difficult times.

IFAD's strong credit rating is also enabling us to borrow at competitive financing terms.

Regarding the implementation of IFAD's Integrated Borrowing Framework, I am pleased to inform Members that IFAD's Euro Medium Term Note programme was successfully finalized and established on 3 December.

This important tool will allow us to enter into private placements swiftly when market conditions are favourable.

In a closed session during this Board, members will be asked to approve a list of private placement transactions. This important step will allow us to enter the IFAD12 cycle well-positioned to raise the necessary borrowing to be allocated through the BRAM.

I am pleased that we have already reached one important milestone with Germany's KfW committing up to EUR 400 million through a loan agreement. This is the first contribution towards the IFAD12 lending programme, and already covers 40 per cent of our target.

On the ASAP+ and Private Sector Financing Programme, we are making good progress, including significant recent contributions from Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg and Sweden. Our commitment is to ensure that these are effective mechanisms to fill the financing gap for climate adaptation and rural transformation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In recent months, it has been especially gratifying to see global attention paid to food systems and small-scale producers. Of course, events like the United Nations Food Systems Summit and COP26 played a role. But I also believe this was testament to the support and commitment of IFAD's Member States, combined with hard work and strategic advocacy by IFAD staff.

We have seen exemplary leadership from Member States at key events, including France for the Paris Peace Forum; Italy for the G20 and the second edition of the Finance in Common Summit; Japan for the 2021 Nutrition for Growth Summit; and Italy and the United Kingdom for COP26.

These processes are critical for a strong and unified response on behalf of the poorest and most marginalized communities.

For instance, at the Finance in Common Summit and with G20 support, public development banks across regions agreed to step up their efforts to catalyse financing for food systems. This included the launch of a Public Development Platform to take this work forward.

Among the many pledges made at COP, there was a historic pledge of US\$1.7 billion by the governments of Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States, and other funders to support indigenous and local communities.

We will continue to do our part to ensure that this directly benefits indigenous peoples.

2021 was a year in which issues of equality were high on the global agenda. IFAD is addressing this internally as well.

As you know, we are submitting a new Strategy on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for Board approval. I am also glad to inform you that a survey on hate speech, racism and discrimination has been carried out among the entire IFAD workforce. The results will be ready and shared with the Board in early 2022.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Looking ahead, it is evident that the challenges of today are likely to remain the challenges of tomorrow: climate change, poverty, hunger, the pandemic, conflict and inequality in all its forms.

IFAD is committed to doing more – in terms of the resources we mobilize, and the impact we achieve. The consolidation of our reforms – including decentralization and new financial tools – put us in a good position to do this and to show concrete results on the ground for rural women and men.

The 2021 Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) showed good results on outreach, outcomes and organizational performance, despite the pandemic. We have also met our decentralization target, with 33 per cent of staff positions now located in country offices – and reached 128 million people in 2020.

However, we can always do better, and in 2022 we will be focusing on sustainability, efficiency, and value for money – including through enhanced country-level policy engagement, advocacy and staff capacity.

Despite the pandemic, there were opportunities to get to the field and see IFAD's investments in action.

Some of you participated in the Executive Board's visit to Egypt and I believe you saw at first-hand how your contributions are impacting the lives of the rural people we serve.

I personally made a recent visit to Côte d'Ivoire, where I saw how the ABC Fund is impacting the lives of cocoa producers.

Investment in three agricultural cooperatives has helped cocoa farmers improve their practices and resulted in achieving certification from Fairtrade, Utz, Organic and Alliance Rainforest. The labelling, combined with better access to markets, has helped farmers increase their incomes.

With more income, the cooperatives could afford to install 10 hydraulic pumps and rehabilitate another 10 to provide drinking water. This particularly benefitted the women, who traditionally collect water.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before ending, I would like to inform the Board that I have been invited by the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI), an independent, non-profit organization to take up the role as Chair of its Board on a pro bono basis, starting in April. The institute provides advice to policymakers and accountability actors, and engages in advocacy to ensure that countries rich in oil, gas and minerals, achieve sustainable, inclusive development. As you may know, it is also co-funded by some of our Member States

(Germany, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States), multilateral institutions and philanthropic organizations.

This has been discussed with the Ethics Office, which indicated that prima facie, there are no apparent conflicts in terms of engaging with NRGi as it is not an entity doing business with IFAD and its mandate does not seem to conflict with IFAD's mission.

In fine, across the board, the results achieved in 2021 provide a strong foundation for our work in 2022, and the start of the IFAD12 programming cycle.

We will continue to be active in global policy processes and will ensure that the voices of the poorest and most marginalized are heard by decision makers.

Thank you.