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**Acceptance re-election statement
by President Gilbert F. Houngbo**

Governing Council — Forty-fourth Session
Rome, 17-18 February 2021

For: **Information**

Thank you and Vision for Second Term

Statement by
Gilbert F. Houngbo
President of the
International Fund for Agricultural Development

Rome
17 February 2021

Mr Sastrosuwito Suminto, Chairperson of the Governing Council,
Distinguished Governors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

My first word is a vote of thanks to all of you. I feel very humbled and I would like to sincerely thank you for the confidence you have shown by electing me for a second term as IFAD's President.

I am humbled and conscious of the task ahead that you have entrusted to me and it is an honour that I do not want to take lightly.

Looking back, I think it is fair to say a lot has been achieved. While preparing for the hearing, I have spent a lot of time reflecting on what still needs to be improved and reached, and the challenges ahead of us.

Looking forward, my first priority – which will not be a surprise – will be the consolidation of the reforms we made over the past four years so that IFAD's trajectory towards doubling its impact by 2030 becomes irreversible.

This consolidation will focus on three mutually reinforcing areas.

First is the decentralization, including the further delegation of decision-making authority to colleagues that are or will be based in the field. Our goal, which was very clearly discussed during the replenishment, is to reach 45 per cent of all staff based in the field by 2025.

The second is that we will continue with our financial reforms and innovations, which will help maximize the leveraging of core contributions. In turn, this will enable us to continue broadening our resource base. The key thing for us to have in mind is how IFAD shall contribute to the wider development challenge to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, particularly with regard to the financing gap for SDG 1 and SDG 2.

The third point is complementing our replenishment funds with the two windows that you are very familiar with – ASAP+ and the Private Sector Financing Programme. Taken together, these will channel additional financing to the most vulnerable countries to address the two biggest development issues. We saw the very good session with Mars in terms of climate change, and most of you are familiar with what IFAD has done since 2012 with ASAP. Bringing that to the next step, with ASAP+, is going to be a critical piece of what I see us doing in the coming few years, maybe several years. You will also not be surprised that I attach great importance to IFAD contributing to youth employment, pairing that with the entrepreneurial opportunities for youth through our private sector window.

All three of these areas shall be considered alongside ongoing efforts to improve the quality of our projects. It is important for us to keep drawing on the recommendations of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD and ensuring that our focus on the mainstreaming thematic areas keeps improving.

In addition to those four areas that we know very well – gender, climate change, youth and nutrition – you will notice through the discussion we had yesterday, in terms of the replenishment, the importance that we are going to attach to biodiversity, as well as our commitment to indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities.

Building better resilience at both the farm and systemic level, including through innovative digital agriculture solutions is also going to be key. If there is one lesson that we are also learning from the impact of COVID, it is the need for us to step up our digital agriculture in the rural areas. Quite frankly, this is an area in which I think I should have done better. We are going to spend more time on this.

Distinguished Governors,

With the pandemic still devastating in many ways our rural settings, and the projections for increased poverty and hunger, the need for IFAD to scale up is more urgent than ever.

Let us be forthright, today it is COVID; yesterday was the tsunami; tomorrow we do not know what it will be. The point is that climate change and extreme weather conditions are not going away. We better be ready or be much better prepared. No rural woman or man should ever be in a position of having to sell his or her meagre assets – or migrate – to survive. IFAD should never forget this.

Finally, let me stress the importance for us to continue to work on managerial excellence, namely internal issues that we have to continue improving. We do have workload issues. We do need to improve work/life balance. Some staff corrected me last week by saying that now work/life balance is becoming work/life blending in the COVID context. We have to work on that as well. We need to enhance measures to incentivize strong performers, and continue to aim for gender parity and geographic balance at all levels. We need to continue to enforce ethical behaviour for us all, at all levels: here in headquarters as well as in the field. This obviously includes doing more to prevent and address all forms of discrimination, and zero tolerance when it comes to sexual harassment and sexual exploitation.

IFAD is evolving in the right direction. Our mission is not limited to fighting against food insecurity and poverty. It calls for a fundamental and structural transformation of rural economies for a fairer, more equitable and just world – for the benefit of all humanity.

Unavoidably, the issue of the financing gap will remain an important point of discussion. I will be engaging with you individually and collectively to deeply reflect on the best ways to leverage our core resources, tapping increasingly on private capital while remaining focused on the poorest and the neediest rural communities.

Once again, I am very humbled by this gesture of your trust in me to lead this institution.

Thank you.