

Welcome address by Jos van Gennip, president of Socires and chair of the Food First Coalition.

Dear Mr. Director General, dr. Graziano da Silva, Dear Ms. Dijksma, State Secretary of Economic Affairs, Dear Mr. Draijer, President of the Rabo Bank, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends.

Monday morning, a conference hall, full with you, with so many young participants. To discuss the future of family farming. Family farming especially on a continent, where only a decade ago being a peasant meant backwardness, poverty, hunger even, no future anyway. A continent where a decade from now food products will be in dire need, with more than half of the population living in urban areas and in a world which in twenty or thirty years times can't miss at all the agricultural potential of this, your Africa. How can peasants become farmers, and farmers agricultural entrepreneurs? How can the prospects of staying in the village be more promising than the exodus to the city? Not only for the bigger and biggest agricultural companies? These questions and challenges were the focus of our discussions in the Food First Coalition, which I have the honour to chair. From the Vijverberg Sessions at the premises of Rabo The Hague till here in this plenary hall.

Exactly three years ago the anxious question was tabled in this hall on the opening conference of the Floriade Food First Conference : will a new government consider international agricultural development a key priority in its new policies. Exactly three years ago at the Floriade Conferences themselves in Venlo this challenge was also posed towards our other partners in our coalition, the business community, the civil society and the academia. Your presence here, Ladies and Gentlemen, is a confirmation that the Netherlands society as a whole considers international agricultural cooperation as not only a necessary central item, but also one with clear and visible perspectives. At least when such cooperation is translated in realistic working together, from the ground, literally from the soil, from the tilling women to the board rooms of international companies, from the managers of storage facilities to the members of parliaments, and from the accountants of the cooperatives to the ministers of agriculture. And so we are here again in our characteristic and rather unique get to gather: government, civil society, academia, business. Dutch and African students. Successful agricultural development and cooperation starts with you there. . Looking around at the participants and the list of speakers: the new food priority shall be your ownership. Only then we can follow.

From the soil - I said – the second pillar of our approach: in fostering agricultural development we are sometimes overconcentrating on the chain, the added value, the end product, the consumer. Let us not forget what is the decisive relevance of the primary process, the needed skills and formation, the sweat and tears, the credit, the unpredictable weather and nature. Any sensible policy should start there -start with and from the farmers end!

And that other point in our series: there is no "one size fits all solution". Not everyone can grow its own food and be self reliant, not all small farmers can stay . Just as the idea that only grand holdings and estates are the solution in agricultural production. Dutch history of which this cooperative organisation is a symbol, proves the contrary.

And that last point: maximum profit making and overexploitation, “going to the very borders of the soil” is another loophole. The real alternative is climate smart agriculture, exactly as *a positive contribution* to the preservation of nature and the creation. Lessons from the watershed conference in the Hague of 2010. Lessons also from the co-founder of the Netherlands rural cooperative network and this bank, Father van den Elsen. He stated already hundred years ago that yes modernisation and conservation should and could go hand in hand!

Today we have to work on these lessons. Thank you for coming and contributing, the speakers, the discussants, the organisers with so much – mostly voluntary - engagement, the sponsors as the Ministries of Foreign and Economic Affairs, the Food and Business Knowledge Platform, Wageningen University, Cordaid, other contributors and especially Rabo and Rabo Foundation as our host.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The underestimation of agriculture and food production in multilateral and national thinking still ten years ago is in today's perception incredible. The reversal of Dutch politics at that time needed a Senate broad resolution, later an articulated report of the World Connectors. Most relevant is this change in the global public opinion towards the triangle agricultural production, food security and sustainability. We are grateful for the rediscovery of it, and the subsequent impetus of numerous publications and conferences. For decades your organisation, mr. Graciano da Silva, was a lonely voice, only gradually over these last years strengthened by reports from for instance the World Bank and other multilateral institutions. But above all by appeals from the global civil society from the Earth Charter fifteen years ago to the new papal encyclical, *Laudato Si*, last Thursday. This all have led to the rediscovery of the need of a new valuation of agriculture. Food security and farming is again central in the sustainable development goals, post 2015. So this conference should foremost put on the agenda not why, but *how* do peasants become decently paid farmers. Better: farmers families, farmers communities even, because farming has to do with much more than just making money, it has social, ethical, environmental and cultural dimensions.. . Agriculture should become the key contributor to this change of values as the Earth Charter stated and as that was exactly reiterated in last week's document from Rome: " Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability,.....and the joyful celebration of life.". It is in this sense that I wish you in name of the Food First Coalition a *fruitful* conference.

Jos J. van Gennip

Chairman Food First Coalition