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**Statement by**  
**H.E. Mrs. Gerda Verburg,**  
**Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality**  
**of**  
**the Kingdom of the Netherlands**  
**and Chairperson of the 17th Session of the Commission on**  
**Sustainable Development (CSD-17)**  
  
**At the Opening of the**  
**CSD-17 Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting**  
**New York, 23 February 2009**

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Your Excellencies,  
Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary General,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are living in a world full of crises: the food crisis, energy crisis and of course the financial crisis.

Sustainable development is hit in its heart.

We are facing the most difficult challenges for sustainable development and environmental management.

But, although the economic crisis is dominating world news, the effects of the food crisis could get more devastating, especially in developing countries.

Let us not forget that a few months ago the news was full of the man-made silent tsunami of food insecurity.

Everyday we see the devastating effects for millions of the world's poorest people.

*What are the problems?*

I am sure you heard the facts.

Today we live in a world in which the average income per capita is higher than any time in the past.

Enough food is being produced to feed everyone!

And yet nearly a billion people still live on less than \$ 1 dollar a day. Most of them depend on agriculture for their daily livelihoods.

Worldwide our governments made the commitment to reduce by half the number of people living in poverty by 2015.

The achievement of this first Millennium Development Goal is further away than ever.

But exponential food prices increases have halted – for now. The global financial crisis has weakened commodity demand, and food prices have dropped 30 to 40 percent.

It is therefore easy to think that the food crisis is over. That would be a mistake.

The food prices will most likely remain well above their pre-2007 level.

Also their volatility will remain.

There are a number of underlying causes for the high food prices, such as less available farm land, droughts, increasing demand for bio-fuels and changing consumption patterns.

But one overarching message is clear: we have neglected agriculture too much for too many years.

At the same time we are confronted with ever rising trends in energy consumption and climate change. Also environmental degradation is higher than ever.

And also let us not forget the competing claims for water. Agriculture is the main user, about 70%, of our fresh water resources worldwide.

Less than 5 percent of the arable land in Africa is under irrigation, compared to more than 40 percent in Asia.

It will be critical to improve efficiency of water use and revive our soils at the same time.

We need support for a green revolution from the international community, especially developed countries.

They have to live to their promises.

They can and may not use the global economic crises as an excuse to pull back on the promises they made.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Looking at CSD-17, I am rallied by all the challenges we face today; in agriculture, rural development, drought, water, land, and desertification.

My deepest hope is that countries will make the sustainable agricultural and rural development agenda central to achieving sustainable development and reducing poverty.

In my capacity of Chairperson of CSD17, I have travelled to regional meetings in Bangkok and Windhoek and to the UNEP Governing Council in Nairobi.

In the discussions I have heard excellent ideas and noticed many concrete actions proposed.

My vision is that we can make a green revolution for sustainable agriculture happen, within environmental constraints, along a five track approach!

First and foremost, we must improve agricultural productivity by *substantially investing more in sustainable agriculture* again.

The Bangkok statement and the Windhoek High Level Declaration clearly state that the potential of agriculture must be unlocked in ways that allow countries to increase their national and household food security.

In many countries the productivity can and should be considerably improved in a sustainable way.

But at the same time, we have to ask ourselves the questions: how much more fertilizers can we use, how much more water, how much more land, how much more environmental degradation can we allow.

What kind of deliverables can you come up with for a way forward?

A green revolution must be homegrown. This should be done by sharing knowledge, technology transfer and capacity building.

A paradigm shift is needed here. Using the latest techniques in local circumstances is needed.

But, how are we getting this new technology available in all countries, especially developing countries.

Sustainable land management should tackle the issue of land degradation and reduction of soil fertility.

Several proposals from the meetings in Africa and Asia referred to the need to take the potential of land and soil into account in the ongoing climate change discussion.

The production capacity of degraded soils must be improved in combination with more efficient water use.

However, in order to get agriculture to blossom, growth in productivity is not enough.

As many said in the regional meetings, this requires integrated systems of natural resource management, efficient use of fertilizers and better water management.

critical factor.

With adequate finance, the right input and sustainable farming practices that revitalize the soil and make wise use of water and land, farmers will increase production.

But they need to be protected from risk in the case of unreliable weather.

Not only adaptive and mitigation measures are needed to deal with climate change, also enhanced safety nets are needed for the most vulnerable people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These tracks can only be successfully implemented within the framework of supportive and gender sensitive policies, at all levels, and effective institutions.

Improving sustainable agriculture goes hand in hand with effective environmental management.

You can and should take a leading role in that regard.

Participatory approaches involve farmers and environmental groups.

You can and should look for developing and up-scaling innovative public and private partnerships in technology, development, extension, finance and in expanding market access.

This upcoming CSD provides a unique and timely platform to tackle the challenges at hand. Its role is more important than ever.

As I said before, CSD-17 should be a forward-looking and action-oriented session, I would like to urge you to develop policy options and adopt and implement practical measures that can effectively address the barriers and obstacles.

Towards this aim, in collaboration with my colleagues in the Bureau, I will present to you at the end of this week a comprehensive draft negotiating text that will aim to facilitate consensus building during the Commission's session in May.

As Chairperson of CSD-17, I pledge to work closely with you to ensure our mutual success during this session.

And I hope to have very productive and enriching discussions as we begin our work. I will listen closely to you, delegates, Major Groups, Farmer leaders, partners from civil society, and build upon your ideas and priorities for action.

The green revolution for sustainable agriculture, while effectively managing our environment, has to become a reality.

To speak with the words of a famous son of Africa: yes we can, yes we should and yes we will make it happen!

Swords into ploughshares, words into action!

Thank you.