Keynote Address

BY

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(Member of the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition)

AT:
THE WORLD FOOD SECURITY SUMMIT
DUBAI, United Arab Emirates
9 FEBRUARY, 2015
Thank you our Moderator, Dr Ashraf Mahate, Head of Export Market Intelligence, Dubai Export Development Corporation

Honourable Felix Koskei, Cabinet Secretary for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Kenya

H.E. Khadim Abdulla Al Darei, Vice Chairman, Al Dahra Agriculture

Dr. Saad A. Kh. Esa, Director, Office of King Abdullah Initiative for Saudi Agricultural Investment Abroad Ministry of Agriculture

Quintin Gray, Agricultural Counselor, Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Consulate Dubai

Kimble Winter, Global CEO, Logistics Executive Group

Thorsten Hartmann, Director EMEA, Canadean

Alan Smith, Managing Director, GCC and Pakistan, Mondelēz International

Rayan M. Qutub, CEO Industrial Valley – King Abdullah Economic City

Amin Khayyal, General Manager, DuPont
On behalf of the African Union Commission, it is an honour for me to participate in this World Food Security Summit and the Gulfood Leaders’ Event.

I look forward to sharing information and knowledge with the global policy makers and senior industry professionals as we explore together strategies for the future of a sustainable global agriculture industry, policy reforms, farmland strategies, agriculture initiatives, just to mention but a few of the major items on our agenda.

I wish to commend the organisers of this important engagement that has brought us together and for placing focus on building coherent global governance for food security and for including African agro-investments into our discussions on commercial and business opportunities pertaining to agriculture and the food industry.

I must say, at the outset, that I consider this as very important for the African Union as it also brings together some of the key players in the Africa – Arab Cooperation in Agriculture which is one of the components of the Africa-Arab Partnership.

This is one of the most valuable partnerships for Africa and we meet regularly up to the highest level. You would recall that the last Summit of Africa and Arab Heads of State and Government took place in Kuwait in 2013. And prior to that, the Second Conference of Africa-Arab Ministers of Agriculture and Rural Development took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the first one having taken place in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt in 2010. And, as you may be aware, the next Africa-Arab Conference of Ministers of Agriculture and Rural Development is scheduled for Kampala, Uganda later this Year.

Within this framework of cooperation, we emphasise public – private partnership and I notice, that it is the same spirit at this World Food Security Summit and the Gulfood Leaders’ Event. In fact, within the framework of the Africa-Arab Conference of Ministers of Agriculture, we have a Steering Committee co-chaired by myself on behalf of the African Union Commission and H.E Dr. Tariq bin Mousa Al-Zadjali, Director General of the Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development, on behalf of the League of Arab States. The Steering Committee is supported by the Joint Facilitation Unit and it is private sector oriented.
In this cooperation framework, Africa’s orientation is guided by the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) which has among its key pillars a focus on investment particularly private sector and market access that goes along with value chain development. The Arab partners have, on their part, the Arab Strategy for Sustainable Agricultural Development (ASSAD) - 2005-2025.

This is especially important because we find that while Africa has a good climate, abundant water resources and fertile soils that enable us to produce food and we have potential to feed ourselves and the rest of the world including our Arab neighbours, our main challenge has been the marketing infrastructure. For example, due to poor storage, Africa loses about 30 per cent of her agricultural products in what we call post harvest losses. This is a major discouraging element to farmers and a big contributor to food insecurity in Africa. And this is an area we would like our Arab partners to join us in addressing. Furthermore, inadequate rural infrastructure makes food transport difficult and subsequently costly and unaffordable to the majority of the population. Again, this is an area we would be interested to encourage Arab investors to venture in. In addition, our food processing capacities are also low to the extent that food losses are exacerbated and value addition is limited and our people are deprived of quality and safe food and this has especially affected our children whereby the rate of stunting remains high. This is yet another area where we would like to invite our Arab agro-industry investors to consider especially processing nutritive diets and I want to emphasise this as a Member of the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition.

Owing to these and related constraints, Africa currently imports nearly US$40 billion worth of food annually. That is why we are emphasizing investment including foreign direct investment in the entire agricultural value chain so that we exploit fully our agricultural potential, minimize post harvest losses, add value to our agricultural products through processing and improve marketing through agribusiness thereby, saving our foreign exchange, also increasing employment especially of the youth and creating wealth or combating poverty.

Besides crop agriculture, Africa also offers extraordinary potential in the livestock sector for food and leather industry but unfortunately many of our pastoralists have not benefitted optimally from this sector. We, therefore,
welcome investors in livestock development, dairy and meat processing and leather value addition, among others, to boost this sector as well. Also investment in making water available in pastoralist communities to prevent unnecessary movements of animals that would otherwise spread diseases and reduce productivity.

I wish to draw your attention to the fact that Africa’s agriculture is predominantly rainfed and this is proving unsustainable in the wake of the climate change and climate variability that has occasioned unpredictable weather patterns. It is now imperative to invest in climate-smart agricultural technologies including irrigation considering that Africa currently uses only 3 per cent of its irrigation potential while demand for food is increasing with the rising population and urbanisation, among other mega trends. Water harvesting is another area we would like to promote. And by the way, Africa lags behind the rest of the world in the use of fertilisers to boost agricultural production and we are in the process of addressing this challenge. I chair the Governing Council of the African Fertilizer Financing mechanism (AFFM) that we are trying to capitalise and operationalise to contribute to the realisation of Africa’s agricultural transformation.

These are some of the areas that we would like to engage with you in taking forward so that Africa does not continue to only pride in holding 60% of the world’s uncultivated arable land and yet having one of the highest numbers of people who are hungry and malnourished. As stated by Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission when she was addressing the 24th Ordinary Session of Heads of State and Government of the African Union last month in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: “Our aspirations and the concrete programmes in Agenda 2063 are very clear: to diversify our economies and industrialise; to have a skills and entrepreneurial revolution, unleashing the creativity and energy of our young people, and to effect an agricultural and agro-processing transformation, so we can feed ourselves and contribute to feeding the world”.

As you may be aware, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union Member States just last month adopted the Strategy and Roadmap to implement the Declaration that they adopted last year which was the AU Year of Agriculture and Food Security where they committed themselves to ending hunger by 2025 through Accelerated Africa Agriculture Growth and
Transformation. We look forward to your partnership in our pursuit of the goal of a food and nutrition secure and poverty free Africa that will also contribute to global food security needs.

Thank you.