

Address by the

Chairperson of GC-16

H.E. Nasser C. Pangandaman, Secretary

Department of Agrarian Reform, Republic of the Philippines

Honourable Chief Guest Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, Vice President of Republic of India, H.E. Dr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, Minister for Rural Development, H.E. Smt. Suurya Kanta J. Patil, and H.E. Shri. Chandra Sekhar Sahu, Minister of State for Rural Development, Dr. Rita Sharma, Secretary (Rural Development), Ministry of Rural Development, Republic of India; Excellencies; Director General, CIRDAP; Distinguished Delegates and Observers; Ladies; and Gentlemen:

Good Morning.

As the Chairperson of CIRDAP's Sixteenth Governing Council Meeting, I would like to extend my warmest greetings to all of you in this inauguration session of the Special Governing Council Meeting and Ministerial Retreat.

On behalf of all the members of the CIRDAP Governing Council, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to H.E. Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, Vice President, Republic of India for gracing this occasion. I would also like to thank Dr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, Minister for Rural Development, Republic of India, for the very kind gesture of hosting this meeting and the Ministerial Retreat on Information and Communication Technology.

I also take pride in conveying best wishes of my Government and my Department to distinguished delegates who are the Ministers of Rural Development of the CIRDAP member countries.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and guests

The founding fathers of CIRDAP have correctly envisioned its objectives as assisting national action; promoting regional cooperation; and act as a servicing institution. There is no doubt that CIRDAP has lived up to these expectations. This may have prompted CIRDAP Member Countries to be steadfast in providing their support to this organization for the last 29 years. India is one of the founding member countries that have been in the forefront in supporting CIRDAP activities. Indeed, all CMCs, consisting of West Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia has benefited from the generous assistance that India provides through CIRDAP for capacity building activities during the past several years.

From the time immemorial, India has been a great influence in the Asian history, philosophy and culture. The Gandhian love has uplifted the spirits of

downtrodden masses everywhere. In the recent time, its innovative adoption of information and communication technology to streamline internal government functions and facilitation of e-governance towards effective citizen services is very much admired by the world. The innovative and best practices in the implementation of e-governance projects could be useful not only in India, but also for other developing countries in providing better citizen services. Hence, the hosting of this Special Governing Council Meeting and Ministerial Retreat is another example of expression of high degree of commitment and regional cooperation among CIRDAP Member Countries.

At present, many countries are in critical situation and experiencing food crisis, energy problem, increasing water scarcity, unequivocal incident of global warming and climate change, prevalence of HIV/Aids and avian flu, insurgency, terrorism, etc., which are among the crushing blows to the achievements made by the CMCs in reducing poverty. To steer CIRDAP in responding to these development challenges along with other actors such as social organizations, International NGOs and Civil Societies in the region, and to maintain the confidence of member countries that CIRDAP can deliver successful and sustainable results, a visionary leader is required for CIRDAP, who is also a good administrator and manager with proven diplomatic skills and well-defined development perspective. And that is why we are here today in Delhi, to decide on its future leadership for the next six years (2008-2012).

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and guests

In the recent times there has been a radical shift in the thinking of Rural Development policy- makers and international institutions on the concerns of development of rural areas and rural people. Some of these concerns involve non-income dimension of rural poverty; qualitative and quantitative aspects in implementation schemes; market and non-market considerations; and participation and empowerment with a standard menu like economic growth, human development and social safety nets, among others. After the globalization, some new concepts have emerged and there was further re-thinking in all the countries - rich, poor and those equipped to face the challenges. These are indicating measures for institutional, political, social and economic reforms. Under such circumstances, CIRDAP has been trying to define its role in the changing global context.

There is no doubt that CIRDAP has made a correct decision to venture out to chart its future road map. As a part of its preparations for the Second Ministerial Meeting in 2009, on a much broader spectrum than the first Ministerial Meeting which was held in 1978, relevant agenda are being fully prepared and now being discussed to make it more meaningful from all angles. It is hoped that this renewed effort will also attract all countries from East Asia and the Pacific Islands who attended and supported the first meeting for the establishment of CIRDAP in 1978. The affiliation of donor countries to CIRDAP would be most welcome. The forum is also expected to provide political will and reiteration of commitment for rural development policy that would go a long way in improving the quality of lives of the rural poor.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and guests

A question often asked is how much a member country has benefited from CIRDAP? As decided in previous Governing Council meeting, a CIRDAP Evaluation Committee consisting of eminent professionals has been entrusted to shed light on this area from the point of view of CIRDAP as well as from the CMCs as an input for the Ministerial Meeting. The impact of a CIRDAP project is not always tangible, nor easily quantifiable and may not manifest itself in a short period of time. However, some indicators which are manifestation of the relevance of activities of CIRDAP can be in terms of how projects could generate subsequent activities, how far findings and recommendations are used as inputs in policy making, action research, capacity building and future research endeavors. Hence the findings of the Evaluation Committee are very interesting and useful for strengthening CIRDAP.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and guests

Last but not the least, the intensified effort of CIRDAP activities in the recent past also paved way for the Policy Dialogues in Bangladesh, Philippines and very soon in Malaysia on very pertinent issues. The Regional Policy Dialogue on 'Agrarian Reform and Rural Development – Sharing Experience of the Philippines' held on 30 May 2007 was of special significance to us in the Philippines.

As you know Agrarian Reform in the Philippines is regarded as a success story to solve centuries-old problems of landlessness in rural areas under a democratic regime through the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), which started in 1988. During the past 20 years, the country has shown some positive results and impacts on the lives of the farmers and many can learn lessons from its success. In this regards, with your kind permission, I would like to thank CIRDAP member countries for pledging support for the extension of the CARP beyond 2008 which was a great source of strength to us, and also a another shining example of CIRDAP's regional cooperation and in assisting national action.

Thank you and good day.