

**Agriculture and Food Day Programme of the International Agri-Food Network
@ Yale Club**

13 July, 9:00 – 10:15am

Opening Statement by H.E. Mr Peter Thomson, PGA 71

*Excellencies,
Distinguished Speakers,
Ladies and gentlemen.*

It is a pleasure to be here with you all this morning.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is hard to fathom in our 21st Century world - a world of incredibly innovative technologies and immense wealth - why 700–800 million people continue to live in extreme poverty, nearly 3 million children under the age of 5 are lost each year to deaths attributable to undernutrition, and 1.9 billion people face the consequences of being overweight and obese.

I find these statistics an affront to human dignity, equity and social justice.

They demonstrate just how far we have to travel to meet the targets provided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's second Goal, that of ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture.

As you know, the High-Level Political Forum is in session at the United Nations this week and next week. This year, the HLPF is examining the SDG's that deal explicitly with Poverty, Hunger, Health, Gender Equality, Infrastructure, and the Ocean. Therefore this is a good time to ask ourselves same hard questions.

Is sufficient momentum strengthening around implementation of these goals? Do we have the necessary multi-stakeholder collaboration in place to rapidly scale up our efforts over the next 13 years? Are we responding to the individual goals in a manner that is coherent with the entire 2030 Agenda?

As President of the General Assembly, I set the theme of the 71st session to be that of a universal push to implement the SDG's. I have been working to ensure that come the end of this 71st session, we will be able to largely answer the hard questions in the affirmative.

We have engaged with the highest levels of government, to the best minds in the business, technology and creative communities, as well as many of the leading actors in the civil society and others.

We have organized a series of High-Level SDG Action Events focusing on the key enablers of sustainable development, namely sustaining peace, climate change, sustainable finance, innovation and education.

And we have organized The Ocean Conference, at which around 6000 representatives of science, business, civil society, multilateral agencies and governments gathered at the United Nations last month. The conference raised global consciousness on Ocean issues, delivered an action oriented Call for Action by all 193 Member States of the UN, and created a massive work plan going forward for those of us in the world who are concerned to see SDG14's targets succeed.

From all of these interactions, it is clear to me that positive momentum is happening for the SDGs. After three visits to FAO headquarters this session and having engaged with the world's leading experts on food and agriculture, including in relation to the developing Blue Economy, while much remains to be done, I believe this holds true for SDG2 as well.

As we work together to respond to the call of SDG2, let us be fully mindful of the global context in which we are working.

While global trends continue to show steady urbanization with 60% of humanity expected to live in cities by 2050, some 70% of the world's poor still live in rural areas where agriculture is the primary source of income and employment. Most of these people are concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Of course agri-business plays a critical role in global food production; but we should never forget that small-scale farmers, fishermen, rural workers and landless people are rightful stakeholders in our global food system.

We know that global demand for food will be increasing in line with population growth and societal change. What we need to give greater attention to is that if we continue with the current patterns of unsustainable overconsumption, we will fail to avert the worst of climate change and we will dramatically accelerate the destruction of the ecosystems of land and Ocean upon which food production and global health so heavily depend.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I offer to you four suggestions by which we can to strengthen momentum on SDG 2 implementation:

Firstly, while recognizing the role of societal norms in global hunger we must ensure empowerment of the most vulnerable, notably women and children.

Secondly, we must work with all actors in the world's food and agriculture system in order to confront the imperfections of systems and markets that see a mere 43% of global grain production go to feeding the world's people; that make the agriculture sector responsible

for 13 percent of total global greenhouse gas emissions, and that sees one third of all food produced lost or wasted between farm and fork.

Thirdly, to close the hunger gap, we must invest in rural infrastructure, agriculture research, extension services and technological development that support the development of small to medium sized enterprises.

And fourthly, we need to support global movements that carry the torch for SDG2 and its related goals. Many of you here today are part of such movements and I encourage you to collaborate more closely so that you bring the SDG's to the people, and so that you help empower farmers and consumers with the knowledge they need to help achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With these suggestions, I congratulate you for organizing this Agriculture and Food Day in support of the HLPF process. I thank you for coming to New York to be part of the momentum of the SDG's. And I encourage you to step forward together so that come 2030, no one is left behind, in hunger or in poverty.