

Opening Remarks by Ms Sachiko Yamamoto,
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On the occasion of the workshop
**Addressing Challenges and Opportunities for
Rural Youth Employment in Asia**
Centara Duangtawan Hotel, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 17-19 August 2009

Mr Changchui He, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of ILO, it is my great pleasure to welcome the participants from the region to the workshop “*Addressing Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Youth Employment in Asia*”. This workshop is organized by three specialized agencies of the United Nations, namely, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as a follow-up to a joint publication “*Training and Employment Opportunities to Address Poverty among Rural Youth*”.

The promotion of decent work, training and education to address poverty among the rural youth and their communities is firmly placed in the global commitment to poverty reduction, a major Millennium Development Goal. With this acknowledgement, and in line with respective mandates, the three agencies have been working together in the spirit of one United Nations.

In the world of work, employment of youth faces a number of challenges. Young workers between the ages of 15 and 24 constitute one in five of all workers in the region. However, they account for almost half of the region's jobless. They are more than three times likely to be unemployed than adults. Even if employed, young people often work for long hours in hard conditions. Their contracts tend to be short-term and precarious, with not much prospects for the future. The current global financial and economic crisis only serves to add to the seriousness of these problems.

These problems of unemployment and hard working conditions are even more serious among the rural youth. The main options for employment among the rural youth are agricultural-based work and community-based entrepreneurial activities. They also make up the majority of migrants streaming into towns and cities in search of jobs. However, the migration does not guarantee better prospect for poverty reduction for the rural youth. The influx of labour migration also weighs enormous pressure on urban labour markets.

The rural youth may engage in one or more of the agricultural-based work, community-based entrepreneurial activities and migration. Meanwhile, there is limited understanding about the advantages and disadvantages of each option in terms of sustainability of income and employment, and decent working conditions. There is also limited information on training and apprenticeship opportunities as well as other support services, such as career guidance, job search assistance, and entrepreneurship support.

This workshop provides a forum for the participants from different countries in Asia to exchange ideas and share expertise to address these issues, with a common goal of promoting employment opportunities for the rural youth. Enhanced decent work opportunities would mean a potential for improved livelihoods for the youth themselves, their families, as well as their communities. Achieving decent work early in the working life would help avoid a vicious circle of unemployment or underemployment, poor working conditions and social exclusion. Tackling the root causes of the youth employment challenge leads to poverty reduction and socio-economic improvement of the region, and contributes to the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

I look forward to hearing the results of the discussions at the workshop, and am keen to see the plans of action that will be formulated. We will share lessons learned across the region, to better respond to the challenges on the employment of the rural youth in our countries and across the region. Let us work together, in the spirit of collaboration, to realize the dreams and aspirations of our young people in rural areas, and work together towards achieving decent work for the rural youth across Asia.