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**SPEECH AT THE HIGH-LEVEL POLICY FORUM ON
“AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOR
REDUCING POVERTY AND HUNGER IN ASIA: IN PURSUIT OF
INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH”**

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*Agricultural and Rural Development
for Reducing Poverty and Hunger in Asia:
In Pursuit of Inclusive and Sustainable Growth*

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**Speech at the High-level Policy Forum on “Agricultural and Rural
Development for Reducing Poverty and Hunger in Asia: In Pursuit of
Inclusive and Sustainable Growth”**

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Distinguished Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, on behalf of the Chinese government, I would like to extend my congratulations on the successful convening of the High-level Policy Forum on “Agricultural and Rural Development for Reducing Poverty and Hunger in Asia”. I also wish to express my appreciation to the organizers ---- the International Food Policy Research Institute and Asian Development Bank for their hard work and to the hosting government of the Philippines for your considerate arrangements.

Over the years, Asian countries have committed themselves to promoting rural development and the fight against poverty, and have made

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remarkable achievements in this regard. So has China. The Chinese Government and the Chinese people have been attaching great importance to poverty reduction and been exploring roads for rural development and poverty reduction that accords well with our national conditions and have made achievements that have attracted worldwide attention.

By the end of 2006, the rural poor without sufficient food and clothing in China fell from 250 million in 1978 to 21.48 million and the poverty incidence dropped from 30% to 2.3%. In the aspect of basic education popularization, the net enrollment rate of primary schools rose from 96.3% in 1990 to 99.15% in 2005. The population coverage of nine-year compulsory education has reached 98%. In the aspect of promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, women's share in education, employment and government positions rose by a big margin. Currently, any gender difference in primary education has been basically eradicated. Women have taken up 45% of the total labor force, which is much higher than the world average rate of 35%. In terms of child mortality reduction, the infant mortality rate dropped from 32.2‰ in 2000 to 19.0‰ in 2005 and the under-5 mortality rate went down from 39.7‰ to 22.5‰. In maternal health improvement, the maternal mortality rate fell from 53.0 per hundred thousand to 47.7 per hundred thousand. In the fight against

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diseases, medical and health facilities and public awareness have been improved substantially and disease-induced mortality reduced remarkably. In terms of ensuring environmental sustainability, major environmental infrastructure has been greatly improved. The national forest coverage rose from 16.55% in 1998 to 18.21% in 2004 and the total area of desertification reduced by 37,924 square kilometers. Not long ago, China released the *National Plan Responding to Climate Change*, elaborating China's objectives, policies and measures to actively address the issue of climate change in the future.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a developing country, we have been attaching importance to learning from experiences and lessons of our own and other countries in the process of development and put forward the people-oriented, scientific development concept to achieve the coordinated development between urban and rural areas, among different regions, economic and social development, people and nature, domestic development and opening up. More importantly, we have paid special attention to the development of poor areas and poor people. After years of efforts, China has now become the first country in the world realizing one of the MDGs to halve the poor population, and has blazed a trail for poverty alleviation that accords well with our national conditions. The main approaches can be summarized as

the leading role of the government, social participation, self-reliance, development orientation and comprehensive and coordinated development.

Leading Role Played by the Government means that the Chinese government mainstreamed poverty alleviation and development work into the national economic and social planning, established specialized organs and funds and formulated a series of important policy documents to guide poverty alleviation efforts, such as, “The National Seven-Year Priority Poverty Alleviation Program” in 1994 and “The Development-oriented Poverty Reduction Program for Rural China (2001-2010)” in 2001. What’s more, the government also designated 592 poor counties and 148,000 poor villages as the national key working counties and villages, to which more attention and support has been given in a planned manner. Duo to the fact that the majority of the poor are concentrated in the rural areas, the Chinese Government has adopted a series of pro-poor policies benefiting rural populations. Such as the exemption of agricultural tax and subsidies given on inputs like the extension of fine strains of seeds and the utilization of large agricultural machines. Poverty reduction has been an important obligation and function of the Government.

Social Participation is to mobilize and organize resources from various

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social sectors including provinces and municipalities in the developed eastern coastal areas, party and government organs at various levels, private sector, social and civil society to participate in the development and construction program in poor areas. For example, 272 central government and party organizations and large state-owned enterprises are commissioned to assist 481 state key working counties; 15 provinces and cities in the coastal area are organized by the central government to support 11 poor provinces in the west.

Self-Reliance is to encourage and support the poor to work solidly and fight against poverty without sitting idly by and waiting for relief. With the assistance of the government and social forces, the poor are encouraged to rely on their own efforts to participate in decision-making, project implementation and management to change the backward situation.

Development-oriented Poverty Reduction is to improve the production and living conditions in poor areas, improve the competence of poor population and enhance the basis for sustainable development and the capacity of self-development. Development-oriented poverty reduction has always been the fundamental policy in our fight against poverty.

Comprehensive and coordinated Development is to integrate poverty alleviation and development with the undertakings of science and technology, education, public health, culture and ecological development in an effort to improve the level of overall competence of the poor population. China's achievements in poverty reduction have not only benefited the Chinese people, but significantly contributed to the global efforts to fight against poverty. According to the World Bank's latest data of poverty from 1990 to 2002 and based on the one dollar a day consumption standard, the number of the poor in China decreased by 195 million, which constitute 90% of the total reduction of the world.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the remarkable achievements in its efforts to fight against poverty, China remains a developing country with low per capita income, the disparities between rural and urban areas, among different regions and groups remains prominent and therefore, still faces a daunting task in the attainment of the MDGs.

First, the number of poor that needs support remains large. Currently, the target of China's poverty reduction includes two groups: one is the 21.48 million rural poor still facing the problem of food and clothing; the other is the 35.5million low-income people. These 56.98 million poor all need

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support. Moreover, we still have over 22 million urban residents living below the line for subsistence allowances, and more than 80 million handicapped people.

Second, it is getting more difficult to solve the rural poverty issue. At present, the rural poor population is mainly distributed over the remote areas where the ecological conditions are harsh, natural resources are scarce, labor forces are in a backward quality, and their capacity of self-development is low. Therefore, more input are needed to address the poverty issue.

Third, low-income households that are living slightly above the subsistence level are still very vulnerable. They could only maintain simple reproductive activities and are easily slip back into poverty due to natural disasters, market risks and family accidents. Therefore, in recent years, the reduction speed of the rural poor has declined. In the late 1980s, the number of the rural poor decreased by 13.5million annually, 5.3million in the 1990s. But from 2001 to 2006, only 13million of the poor got rid of poverty each year.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Faced with these challenges, the Chinese Government continues to attach

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great importance to poverty alleviation and development during the implementation of the 11th Five Year Plan and keep the issue of agriculture, rural areas and farmers top on the government agenda and implement the principle that “industry feeding back agriculture, cities supporting countryside” and “giving more, taking less and loosening control”. We have taken a series of measures to strengthen our support to agriculture and rural areas. For example, we have increased our input to rural education, health, culture and family planning and other social undertakings, expanded the subsistence allowances system around the country and set up poverty relief and old-age pension systems. Moreover, we have stepped up our efforts and input in poverty reduction to improve the basic production and living conditions in rural areas, the competence of the rural poor, and explore income-generating activities and approaches for farmers.

Besides, China has carried out effective cooperation with different countries and international organizations and has obtained extensive support from the international community. In 2004, the Global Conference on Scaling up Poverty Reduction was held in China where China announced to donate 20 million US dollars to Asian Development Bank to establish the China Poverty Reduction and Regional Cooperation Fund. In 2005, China International Poverty Alleviation Center was

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established in Beijing, which has created a new platform for international poverty alleviation cooperation. Based on the spirit of equality, mutual benefit and common development, we are always ready to exchange and cooperate with countries present at this meeting through multi-lateral and bi-lateral channels to share experience, carry out pragmatic cooperation and make unremitting efforts to promote agricultural and rural development for reducing poverty and hunger in Asia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.