**2 July 2013, Rome** – As **Codex Alimentarius**, the **world’s top food standard body** for **consumer protection** and **fair practices** in **international food trade**, celebrated its **50th anniversary**, the FAO and WHO Directors-General and national governments united in their praise for its benefits.

“Today, Codex standards are the benchmark standards for food safety. There is no competition,” Dr. Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General, told the Codex Alimentarius Commission at its annual meeting. “They are internationally recognized as the best, at every point along the food chain.”

She said the joint FAO-WHO programme, founded in 1963, is “one of the longest-running collaborative undertakings in the UN family, and it has been profoundly effective.”

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva told the assembly: “The Codex Alimentarius is as relevant today as when it was created. Codex helps to improve access to healthy, nutritious food, and provides standards to guide people who depend directly on agriculture and the food system for their livelihoods.”

“Food safety is also important to FAO’s global goal of eradicating hunger and malnutrition, since people cannot be food secure, if their food is not safe,” he said.

Codex Alimentarius (Latin for food code) is a collection of international food standards, guidelines and codes of practice aiming at protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in food trade. Harmonized standards help remove barriers to trade and allow freer

movement of food between countries while protecting the health of consumers.

Codex has established more than 200 food standards and more than 100 guidelines and codes of practice for food production and processing. Maximum permissible levels have been established for thousands of food additives, contaminants, pesticides and veterinary drug residues.

FAO and WHO carry out capacity development programmes that promote effective participation of developing countries to ensure that the 185 member countries of Codex all have a voice in the standard setting process. The Codex Trust Fund has over the last 10 years also provided capacity building as well as financial support for travel to those members who need it.

**Developing countries describe benefits**

Developing countries attending the Commission meeting praised Codex for giving them a basis for national food legislation, protecting their consumers and allowing their countries to compete in international food trade.

"I can say without a doubt that Codex standards have been the basis for our food legislation," said Gloria Abraham Peralta, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock of Costa Rica. She praised Codex's contribution to food safety and quality and said it had fostered "knowledge-based agriculture" in her country.

Ghulam Nabi Azad, Minister of Health and Family Welfare of India, said the Codex Alimentarius was vital as his country worked towards nutrition security and enacted food security legislation. "Since India imports a lot of food, Codex is very important for our country also," he said.

Assik Tommy Tomscoll, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock of Papua New Guinea, spoke about how important Codex was for the economies of small countries such as the Pacific island states. He said he could envision a world where trade barriers were removed and "Codex

Alimentarius will be the global blueprint for free and fair global practice.”

**Future of Codex**

Both Directors-General spoke of the need for Codex to move with the times.

“Codex must keep pace with a changing world, in which transportation, communications and scientific developments move at a much faster pace than before with direct and significant implications for food safety,” said Graziano da Silva.

He stressed the need for cooperation to integrate Codex even more completely in the world’s food system. “It is important to act together, to strive for even greater collaboration, across different sectors, across national borders and among jurisdictions.”

Margaret Chan pointed at the growing worldwide trend towards obesity and noncommunicable diseases: "Today, the cheapest, most convenient, most accessible, and best-tasting foods are often energy rich, yet nutrient poor. Today, obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases often exist side-by-side with undernutrition in the same country, even in the same community or household."

“It is good to know that Codex is now addressing this issue through its nutrition and food labelling committees,” she said. “This may be one of the next great challenges for Codex: to introduce greater balance in the world’s food supply.”