

Closing Speech by Commissioner Phil Hogan at Cork 2.0 Conference on Rural Development

6th September 2016, Cork

- Check Against Delivery –

- Commissioners, Elected Representatives, my fellow rural citizens, ladies and gentlemen,
- In my opening remarks yesterday, I referred to the original Cork Declaration of 1996 as *"the blueprint for the policy that has done so much to support farmers and rural communities across the European Union."* Today, together with some of those participants from 20 years ago, a new generation of rural stakeholders and policymakers have delivered a new Cork Declaration – *A Better Life in Rural Areas.*

- Over the past two days, I have witnessed a commitment to and passion for the development of our rural areas, something to which I attach enormous importance.
- I have said before that the Common Agricultural Policy is a policy for all the people of Europe. Rural development is an essential element of that policy and, as such, has an impact that goes far beyond the obvious financial beneficiaries.
- Agriculture, forestry and their related sectors support 44 million jobs throughout the EU and are essential for the economic, environmental and social development of viable rural areas and communities, both directly and indirectly.
- Though farmers and foresters are the custodians of 85 per cent of the territory of the EU and are by far the largest direct beneficiaries from the CAP in terms of direct payments and rural development payments, the ultimate beneficiaries are the tens of millions of citizens who live in the countryside or those who perhaps live in urban centres but regularly enjoy rural amenities. And what about all of us, as citizens, who benefit every day from the contribution that our rural areas make to climate change mitigation ?

- Everybody benefits from viable farms capable of preserving landscapes and feeding into local economies; we all benefit from climate action and improved environmental management and all of us benefit from thriving rural communities.
- The 1996 Cork Declaration was a defining document, charting a course ahead and has served stakeholders and policymakers well for 20 years. Today, you have delivered a new Cork Declaration, worthy of its predecessor, which is fit-for-purpose to address the new challenges of the 21st century
- We need constantly to ask ourselves the question as to whether we can do better and we must always be open to the idea that we can. Likewise, we must be conscious that we are spending public money and the public are entitled to the delivery of public services which are both appropriate and deliver value-for-money.
- I can only be impressed with the ingenuity and incredible hard work, led by Heino von Meyer, which has resulted in today's Declaration. The key points of the Declaration accurately reflect the key priorities for the development of our rural areas from an economic, social, environmental and community point of view.

- Before the conference, I posed the question "*how can rural areas and the communities that live in them leverage their strengths to be full partners in developing solutions to today's global challenges?*". Today, I believe that your work has gone a very long way to answering that question.
- Briefly, I want to acknowledge some specific aspects of the Declaration reflect the priorities that we must all face together. In particular, I regard it as important that you have focused on the need to promote rural prosperity and strengthen rural value chains.
- It is appropriate too that we continue to invest in rural viability and vitality and it is essential that we work together, in a bottom-up approach. We see clearly now how indispensable rural areas are for preserving the rural environment, managing our natural resources and appropriate climate action.
- The last twenty years have seen huge strides made in the areas of knowledge and innovation and that pace of change in these areas mean that we must boost and foster the knowledge economy and embrace the ongoing and future advances in research and development.

- Because we are investing billions of taxpayers' euro every year, it is important that the public has confidence in what is being done in their name and, therefore, we must constantly strive to ensure the highest standards of rural governance while, at the same time, pursuing an agenda of simplification and transparency.
- I said earlier that we must constantly ask ourselves if we can do things better and, bearing that question in mind, we must, at all times, aim to improve policy delivery and performance. We see now that the involvement of rural citizens in the policy design is a core ingredient for a successful policy implementation, as well as the partnership principle and strategic programming, based on common objectives.
- In my foreword for this conference, I said that it *"must deliver a new Cork Declaration with the goal of empowering rural areas to meet the wide range of challenges and opportunities that face them in the 21st century: economic, infrastructural, social and – increasingly – environmental and climate-related."*
- I believe that you have done that. But today is not the end of the road, it is merely an important milestone. The real works

starts now. As European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, I accept the Declaration that you have delivered and will give it most serious consideration.

- Together, we now have the shared objective to ensure that the contents of this Declaration are heard far and wide and by the people that matter. Together, we can make a contribution to global and European challenges by finding solutions to local challenges.
- I want once again to thank all of the conference participants for your constructive approach to and involvement in the work of the conference.
- Finally, I call on you all to form a strong and united rural voice to make sure this Declaration serves its intended purpose. Rural stakeholders must pull together, not apart.
- We are here because rural voices must be heard when big decisions are made. The need for rural proofing of all policies is essential in this respect. You have successfully managed to pull together a strong, uniting declaration that speaks in clear language. This is our manifesto. Now we need to raise our voices to make it heard.

- The rural voice will only be heard if it is loud. And let me be quite clear: it will only be loud if we are united. I urge you to maintain and deepen the relationships you have made here in Cork for this purpose.

Ends.