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## Committee on World Food Security adopts Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests

Rome, 11 May 2012 – The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security were formally adopted today by a special session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) held at FAO Headquarters in Rome. It is the conclusion of a process where Governments, international organisations, civil society and the private sector worked together for more than two years in a spirit of collaboration, respect and common understanding.

*"The guidelines will be voluntary, but because they have been drawn up in such a comprehensive and inclusive process, and because there is this shared perception that a framework like this is sorely needed, we all anticipate that they will set the bar for policymakers"* said Yaya Olaniran, current chair of CFS.

The European Union places a high emphasis on the Voluntary Guidelines as a tool which can help national governments and other stakeholders to strengthen the governance of tenure of the important resources on which so many around the world depend for their livelihoods. The guidelines underline the necessity to recognize existing legitimate tenure rights, including of those with informal tenure rights. The UE is particularly pleased that the Guidelines are based on the respect of existing tenure rights, and on sound principles including human rights, equity, gender equality, rule of law, transparency and accountability.

The guidelines also address the issue of investments in agriculture in this spirit, acknowledging that responsible public and private investments are essential to improve food security while stressing that they should do no harm, respect human rights and safeguard against dispossession of legitimate tenure right holders and environmental damage. The guidelines recognize that States should provide specific safeguards when investments involving large-scale transactions of tenure rights are being considered.

The European Union and its 27 Member States are one of the principal supporters of the reformed CFS including its Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) and Private Sector mechanism (PSM) established to enable participation of civil society organisations and representative from the private sector in the work of the Committee.

The Voluntary Guidelines are an important priority for the European Union and its Member States and their adoption represents a great success for the reformed CFS and its participants. They are elaborated through an inclusive and participatory process and constitute a first international step of considerable importance in this essential field that addresses sensitive issues such as access to land, fisheries and forests as well as responsible investments with transactions in tenure rights

The practical implementation of the Guidelines is now the challenge for national governments and all stakeholders.

### Background

The European Union places a high emphasis on the Voluntary Guidelines as a tool which can help national governments and other stakeholders to strengthen the governance of tenure of the important resources on which so many around the world depend for their livelihoods. By promoting secure tenure rights and equitable access, the Voluntary Guidelines therefore have the potential to contribute to improved food security as well as the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food.

The endorsement of the Voluntary Guidelines is the culmination of a participatory and multi-stakeholder process begun in 2009 and leading up to three rounds of negotiations held at FAO headquarters in Rome over the course of 2011. In late 2010, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) established an Open-Ended Working Group on the Voluntary Guidelines to take forward the finalisation of the guidelines.

The European Union and its Member States engaged very actively in the process. In June 2011, a Working Group was established in Rome to consolidate the EU position agreed at Council level in Brussels, to undertake outreach to key stakeholders, and to negotiate the text. Switzerland joined this group and associated itself to all of its decisions. A significant number of land tenure specialists appointed by EU Member States as well as by Switzerland provided invaluable technical expertise throughout the process. As part of its overall support to the CFS, the European Commission and several member states such as Germany, Finland and Spain provided funding for the elaboration of the Voluntary Guidelines, their negotiations in the CFS, for the of participation of Civil Society in the process as well as for the special session of the CFS today.

All stakeholders in this process now face the real challenge of practical implementation of the Guidelines. The European Union is committed to supporting this process.

**For more information on the Voluntary Guidelines:**

<http://www.fao.org/nr/tenure/voluntary-guidelines/en/>

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