TALKING NOTES DURING REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON CUSTOMARY TENURE RIGHTS IN EASTERN AFRICA

1. ***Hon. Alice M. Wahome*** *- Cabinet Secretary, MoLHPWUD*
2. ***Mr. Gershom Otachi*** *- Chairman, National Land Commission*
3. ***Ms. Mary Mwiti*** *- CEO, Council of Governors*
4. ***Ms. Myra Bernardi*** *- EU Delegation to Kenya - Head of Section, Green Growth and Livelihoods*
5. ***Mr. Audace Kubwimana*** *- Africa Regional Coordinator, ILC*
6. ***Mr. Richard Blane*** *- WHH*
7. ***Mr. Christian Friedemann*** *- BMZ Representative*
8. ***Dr. Hassan Roba*** *- Christensen Fund*
9. ***Abdi Omar-*** *Board Chairman, RECONCILE*

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Morning

1. First, it gives me great pleasure to give these opening remarks during this very important regional conference on customary tenure rights in Eastern Africa. The theme chosen for this conference **"Making Land Policy Reforms Work for Communal Land Rights in Eastern Africa"** is timely given the implementation of significant land reform initiatives aimed at empowering local people to better own and manage their natural resources in East Africa.
2. Land is at the core of the FAO mandate; so is the issue of leaving no one behind which this conference endeavors to contribute towards.

3. Secondly, I wish to acknowledge and thank the co-organizers of this event for bringing together all key stakeholders across the East African region. This demonstrates your commitment towards making land policy reforms work for communities in East Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen

4. Land in East Africa and anywhere else is a very important factor of production yet very sensitive. Land governance issues in the region are at the forefront and center of meeting the development challenges.

5. The key challenges facing Land in East Africa range from rising pressures on community lands and rising levels of land tenure insecurity. This is due to rising agricultural and commercial land values, declining governance standards, competing land uses and an expanding population.

6. These pressures are causing widespread conflicts, including violent outbursts between rival land user groups, as well as a decline in livelihoods and cultures that are intimately connected to the land.

7. Customary land tenure remains a major landholding system today, alongside statutory and Islamic property systems. At least 2.5 billion people hold community lands accounting for over 6 billion hectares, more than half the global land area.

Ladies and gentlemen

8. Customary Land tenure systems use communities' customs to govern community lands; that is to determine who can use what resources for how long, and under what conditions. In Kenya for example, community land covers 70% of its landmass, and its registration has been enabled by the progressive Community Land Act of 2016.

9. When FAO supported the implementation of this legislation, through the EU-funded Land Governance Programme in 2016, there were teething challenges. These included the absence of grassroots structures, a lack of awareness on what entailed community land, the absence of technical officers such as the Community Land Registrars and the lack of equipment to facilitate the mapping of community lands. I am happy that through these partnerships with Ministry of Lands, Housing, Public Works and Urban Development, National Land Commission and the respective County Departments of Lands, have managed to address most of these challenges.

10. Today, through this strong partnership, we have supported the Government of Kenya to register and issue over 40 Community Land Registration Titles in West Pokot, Kajiado, Turkana, Garissa, Laikipia and Samburu Counties. The most recent was the securing of the 390 hectares Kokwa Island owned by the Ilchamus, a minority community in Baringo County last week on **11th October 2023**. Currently through E.U-FAO Digital Land Governance Programme we anticipate supporting the registration of over 60 Community Lands in Kenya.

11. Behind these successes are intensive awareness forums, boundaries mapping and reestablishment, mapping of public land and other resources, land use planning and formulating community by-laws. All these have been made possible by strong and dedicated land technical officers, at both national and county levels, which I sincerely wish to appreciate today.

Ladies and gentlemen

12. Through the E.U-FAO Digital Land Governance Programme we advocate for participatory land-use planning which empowers local people to manage natural resources in a sustainable and organized way. Above all, it involves looking at land use in a comprehensive way and from the perspective of local land users, taking into

consideration physical, socio-economic, legal and cultural factors, as well as any prevailing official planning processes as may be prescribed by the authorities in charge.

Ladies and gentlemen

13. I understand that the salient features of the discussions will be captured and form part of the final declaration. Let me assure you of our commitment as FAO to implement the actions from the various sessions and continued partnership on making land reforms work in customary land rights in East Africa.

14. Once again, I am grateful to be part of this auspicious occasion.

Asante Sana.