

At CFS Special Event, leaders call for a united front in the fight against COVID-19 and hunger

Speakers at the CFS High-Level Virtual Special Event on Strengthening Global Governance of Food Security and Nutrition have called on opinion leaders, scientists, legislators, private sector among other actors to work in unity, and address COVID-19 alongside transforming food systems as the only way of taming the ever growing food insecurity.

“We are at a critical turning point for humanity diets, and food production must radically change if we want to achieve truly sustainable development and achieve the goals we set ourselves for 2030,” said Thanawat Tiensin, CFS Chair and the Permanent Representative of Thailand to the UN Agencies in Rome. He further noted that COVID 19 has worsened a situation where millions of people are suffering from hunger, wasting and stunting.

The event brought together government representatives, United Nations agencies, civil society and non-governmental organizations, private sector associations, philanthropic foundations, international agricultural research centers, and international and regional financial institution

“This is simply unacceptable. We must find a solution, and that can only happen if we use a collective approach,” he told participants during the virtual event.

The Rt. Hon Zac Goldsmith, Minister of State, Minister for Pacific and the Environment, UK pointed out that most people today produce and consume food in an unsustainable manner.

“The way we have produced and consumed food in the past few decades has caused more damage on individual levels for poor quality diets that have (always) caused poor health,” said the Minister.

“Pre-production and consumption patterns are responsible for up to 29 percent of greenhouse productions. It is the way we produce and consume food that is devastating to our food security,” he said.

Goldsmith’s sentiments were echoed by Gilbert Hounbo, the President at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) who said that with COVID-19, the goal of ending hunger seems more elusive than usual.

“We are facing an additional challenge of COVID 19 and the stakes are much higher,” he said noting that the pandemic has shown a spotlight on just how much the world relies on small scale farmers who produce half of the world’s food calories.

“COVID-19 has revealed the cost of underinvestment in agriculture, and it has underscored the need to restructure our food systems,” Hounbo told the virtual conference

According to Syahrul Yasin Limpo, Minister for Agriculture, Indonesia, this kind of a forum is a very critical venue to share and learn from other countries globally. “Today, Indonesian agriculture contributes to about 14 per cent of our Gross Domestic Product, and the sector is

providing employment for almost half of the population, but still, we can do better with these kind of lessons,”

He said that food systems should be sustainable, climate adapted, nutritious, inclusive, resilient, and efficient and above all, food systems should not underestimate small scale producers.

However, David Beasley the Executive Director, World Food Program (WFP) noted that there have been tremendous achievements in food systems for the past several years, but some of these successes are being threatened by emerging challenges.

“200 years ago, when there was 1.1 billion people on earth, 94 percent of the people on the planet were in extreme poverty. Today less than 10 percent languish in extreme poverty. That means we have made good progress, designed and built systems, and we have shared wealth to improve the quality of lives,” said Beasley.

“The great news is that we’ve made so much progress in the last 200 years, but the really bad news is the last three to four years ago we are going backwards,” he said pointing at challenges such as climate extremes, cyclones, floods, hurricanes, and now, COVID-19.

“Since COVID struck, over 1 million people have died from the pandemic, but in the same vein, 7 million people in the same period of time have died from hunger,” said the WFP boss.

He warned that that hunger is not properly addressed alongside health (COVID-19) pandemic, the world could see the number of people dying from the economic deterioration, supply chain disruption go up by four to five times more than what we are seeing on the hunger death rate so far.

Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said that food waste was another burden facing the world today. “CFS is in a unique position to bring all its members on board to protect food wastes. Together we will think bigger, and create bigger impact on the ground,” he said.

His sentiments were also echoed by Beasley. “Imagine 1.3 billion metric tons of food waste. That’s equivalent to \$750 billion if not more worth the value of food lost at the table and lost in the field. That could feed 2 billion people,” he said.