

**DIMITRA Relaunch Workshop – 24 October 2002
King Baudouin Foundation, Brussels**

**Speech of Dr. Manfred Lindau,
Director, FAO Liaison Office with EU and Belgium**

“Hunger in the world and the World Food Day in 2002”

Madam President,
Ladies, Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

I am very happy to be present amongst this essentially feminine gathering because the FAO has always paid sustained attention to women's causes and to the essential role they play to ensure food security in numerous countries. During the World Food Summit in 1996, the Director General of the FAO, Jacques Diouf, evoked the 'formidable potential' of women to help meet the food challenge of the 21st century. Yet the work of women often remains misunderstood and underestimated. Women are too often the invisible actors in development. FAO studies show that in most developing countries, women are the pillars of the agricultural sector, food systems, and the daily sustenance of families, and also represent the major part of the agricultural workforce. The decision-makers, the development planners and the agricultural service providers unfortunately do not take sufficient account of the importance of women in the agricultural production process. As a result, women have more difficulties than men to access production factors, like land, credit and agricultural inputs, technology, extension work, training and other services which strengthen their production capacity.

FAO recognises that it is crucial to give women the means to raise nutrition levels, improve production and distribution of food and agricultural products as well as the living conditions of rural populations. The FAO has developed a new Plan of Action for women. This is the 2002-2007 Gender and Development Plan of Action which aims in particular to ensure the fair distribution of the benefits of change and their joint management between men and women, whether in matters of resources, agricultural services or jobs.

Agricultural production which depends largely on women's work can only be increased if their social position is ensured and their legal status fully recognised. It will only be in this way that they will have unrestricted access to credit and other production factors. These fundamental conditions must accompany the extended schooling of women and of their education. In this perspective, new technologies are increasingly indispensable to overcome the deficiencies of training and the FAO intends making good use of them.

In fact it is in this way that the Dimitra project has been able to extend its network of rural women and enabled the circulation of information. My presence before you here today also gives me the opportunity to remind you that last Wednesday, 16 October we celebrated World Food Day.

The cruel irony of today is that while the world produces enough food globally to feed its six billion inhabitants, hunger still persists in most of the developing countries. The fight against poverty cannot be won without eliminating hunger. Hunger is the most critical manifestation of poverty. Hunger and malnutrition are both the causes and effects of poverty. As up to this time actions have not reflected words, there is an urgent need to intensify our fight against poverty and hunger.

The international community has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to fighting hunger. In particular at the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) in Rome representatives of 185

nations and the European Community set a goal of cutting the number of hungry people by half by 2015. Unfortunately in spite of this commitment too little purposeful action has been taken towards eradicating hunger. The number of hungry people in the world is not falling fast enough to meet the ambitious goal of the 1996 WFS Plan of Action.

The latest figures of FAO show that to meet the target of the 1996 WFS the number of hungry will have to fall by 22 million every year, compared with the six million a year attained on average over the last years of the 1990s. This is also the reason why the Director General of FAO assembled the leaders and representatives of 179 nations and the European Community in Rome from 10 to 13 June this year, at the World Food Summit: five years later (WFS: *fy*), in order to give new impetus to world wide efforts on behalf of hungry people and to raise political will and financial resources.

The mobilisation of an “International Alliance against hunger” will help to regain centre stage in the concern and priorities of governments, parliaments, local authorities and civil society. The Anti Hunger Programme was released, serving as a basis for work and dialogue among partners to mobilize the resources that are needed today. The necessity of empowering women remains undisputed and a central objective in view of poverty alleviation and the eradication of hunger.

The Director General of FAO said in his statement at the Inauguration of the World Food Summit: five years later:

“The societies of abundance of this millennium have the resources and the technology to eliminate the insufferable spectre of cyclical famine and the inexorable deprivation of chronic hunger”.

If we agree on the goal to make a world free from hunger a reality, we should less discuss small differences in actions but strengthen partnership to tackle the challenge together.

Last Wednesday 16 October we have celebrated World Food Day. Every year at this date World Food Day is observed, marking the founding of FAO on 16 October 1945. The celebration of World Food Day aims to heighten public awareness about FAO’s mandate to raise the levels of nutrition and to promote better understanding of measures that need to be taken in order to alleviate poverty and to eradicate hunger. This year’s World Food Day theme is “Water: Source of Food Security”.

FAO is convinced that improved agricultural techniques and better water efficiency are key to feeding a growing population.

In his message for World Food Day 2002 the Director General of FAO points out:

Quote:

“Water is central to the survival of humanity. It is a matter of great concern to all, because a limited resource shared by a growing population. Water has political, economic, social and ecological implications. But it is above all linked to food, for 70 percent of the world’s water resources are used for agriculture. In a world with diminishing supplies of drinking water, how are we to ensure that all have the water they need to feed themselves without harming other sectors, without destroying our environment? This is first and foremost a challenge for agriculture. The production chain must produce more with less water, and small farmers need to play a part. They must therefore be trained and actively involved. A new water policy is needed, with priority to solutions that avoid waste. More effective solidarity should call on the cooperation of all development partners in resolving potential conflicts and mobilising financial resources. The conditions are also needed for the economic management and fair distribution of water. Greater mobilisation of civil society and farmers’ organisations is fundamental if we are to tackle the water crisis and finally achieve our objective of ‘Food for

All'. Closer monitoring is needed, especially in countries and regions that are affected by drought, so that famine and conflict can be avoided. Tomorrow's world will have enough water if we start managing it prudently today".

Unquote

We are approaching the end of a year which was characterised by the holding of important international conferences such as the WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha, the Monterrey Conference on Financing of Development, the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and last but not least the World Food Summit *five years later* (WFS *fy*) in June in Rome.

Resolutions, declarations, agreements, plans of action and protocols have been adopted and we all hope that the results of these world conferences will help to build a better future for our world.

For your further deliberations and exchange of views I wish you a great success and I hope that the results of this conference will contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of the important role women play in agricultural production and in achieving Food Security.

Before bringing my statement to a close I have the pleasure to introduce the next speaker, my esteemed colleague from Headquarters, Mrs. Sissel Ekaas.

Sissel Ekaas is the Director of the Gender and Population Division at FAO Headquarters in Rome. Mrs. Ekaas has held her current function since January 1998. Among her many initiatives, she has spearheaded the development of a new - as already mentioned above -, organisation-wide Gender and Development Plan of Action for the period 2002-2007, which was endorsed by the FAO conference in November 2001. In 1999 she organised a high level Consultation on Rural Women and Information at Ministerial level, and during the World Food Summit: *five years later* she was responsible for the holding of a well-attended side-event on Rural Women as crucial partners in the fight against hunger and poverty. Sissel Ekaas was educated in Norway, the United States and Canada in International Relations, Business Administration, and Languages. Before joining the FAO she worked in various different functions for the United Nations Development Fund and other United Nations Organizations, for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as for the Norwegian Ministry of Development Co-operation and the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD).

Her experience in international affairs and development as well as in gender policies is a great asset for FAO.

Thank you for your attention.