

World Summit on Food Security 2009
Presentation of Declaration by Professor Mohammad Saeid Noori Naeini
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Mr Chairman
Distinguished Heads of State and Government
Mr Director-General of FAO
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

International Organizations and independent researchers have accepted that misguided policies, underinvestment in agriculture and lack of coherence and coordination of action at all levels over the past three decades have contributed to increasing poverty and hunger in the world. Furthermore, recent financial crises have triggered the explosion of shameful levels of hunger which now stand at a daunting one billion.

We can successfully address the problem of hunger and poverty only if the following prerequisites are respected:

I. It is not only a moral obligation to eradicate hunger and malnutrition from our planet, but it is also a fundamental right of every human being to live a life free from hunger, and with dignity. Although the guidelines on the right to food is a fairly recent item on the agenda of FAO and it is still voluntary, conceptually this has been a guiding light for great thinkers and humanists. As an example, let me take you back in time to the dawn of the second millennium, to a city in Northern Iran, home to the great Sufi, Abolhasan Kharaghani, whose house was open to all. The following words were written over the entrance: “Whoever enters this house, give him/her food, don’t ask his/her faith: because he who is entitled to life from the Almighty is surely entitled to food from Abolhasan”. A clear statement of the right to food and dignity by all, stemming from the right to life.

II. We must address the root causes of poverty with a system wide approach. Piecemeal and isolated actions are prone to failure, in spite of billions of dollars of investment and the engagement of the best of human talent over recent decades.

The UN Secretary General has convened a food crisis task force of senior officials in the UN system and Bretton Woods Institutions and the Rome based agencies have initiated work on a common strategy. G8 and G20 countries have made commitments to combat unacceptable levels of food insecurity. The newly reformed Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the “global partnership” are steps in the right direction. But, despite our best efforts, the international system is not working as a coherent whole.

Recent evaluations of international institutions have highlighted the failings of the global system. There was “mandate creep” between organizations, despite scarce resources. There were gaps in the architecture, especially as regards funding and overall analysis, and there were failures to pursue possibilities for increased effectiveness especially by joined-up action at country level.

Thanks to these recent evaluations, the diagnosis at the level of individual elements of the system is there. The overall diagnosis to create a system-wide approach is missing. Individual parts of the world system must move forward together for the greater good. Governing Bodies must start playing a more decisive role. We have too long neglected these issues despite membership in these organizations. And this includes the burning issues of our age such as climate change as an essential component of any action which aims to reduce food insecurity and eliminate hunger.

III. The mere fact that three quarters of the malnourished live in rural areas, earning their livelihood from agriculture necessitates that small-scale, low-income agricultural households, including farmers, live stock producers, small and artisanal fishermen and forest dwellers, be considered as dynamic global partners in the fight against poverty and hunger - and not simply the recipients of aid. While we “strive for a comprehensive twin-track approach to food security that consists of 1) direct action to immediately tackle hunger for the most vulnerable and 2) medium and long-term sustainable agricultural, food security, nutrition and rural development programmes to eliminate the root causes of hunger and poverty, including through the progressive realization of the right to adequate food”, we have to be mindful of the fact that the second track is the only sustainable fundamental solution to food insecurity. Let’s listen to the roar of the silent cry of the poor agricultural producers: “Do not give us assistance; assist us to produce our own food with pride, with dignity.”

IV. Most recently, we have witnessed the extreme fragility of our global financial and socio-economic systems. In order to have a minimum of protection for the poor and hungry in a highly uncertain world, I strongly believe that people-owned programs prepared in a results based framework to deal with root causes of the problems bear the seeds of success. These delicate plants need careful nurturing. Committed national Governments, supported by relevant

regional and international institutions should provide this care and attention. This will not happen if we fail to make two major cultural changes. First, at the personal and institutional level, by moving from a culture of isolated individualism to a culture of cooperation, avoiding duplication, bridging gaps. Second, at Global level we have to move from maximizing our national profit, a “culture of greed”, to a culture of respect for the poor and put them back on the path of development: “the culture of caring”.

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This Summit, which is based on the outcomes of the Independent External Evaluation of FAO and its Immediate Plan of Action, the High Level Expert Forum on How to Feed the World in 2050, and a reformed Committee on Food Security, is a stride in the right direction at the right time; more than a billion poor and hungry people look to us today. It is in this spirit, and following on from some of the ideas I have just shared with you, that this declaration has been prepared and is presented here for adoption. It is my personal view that this is the very minimum expectation of the poor and hungry. I hope that many more personal, national and international contributions will emerge during these days of good political will and human generosity.