

**Address of Agriculture Minister at the World Summit on
Food Security**

The Heads of State, Heads of Governments, Director General FAO, Heads of National Delegations, Heads of International Organizations, ladies and gentlemen.

I compliment Director General FAO for organizing this Summit in view of the pressing need to draw attention of the world leaders to the stark reality of the rising number of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition. I hope we can move from words to action in this Summit to address the problem.

I share the concern with other leaders that the World Food Summit (of 1996) target of reducing the number of undernourished by half, to no more than 420 million, by 2015 is unlikely to be realized if the present trend continues, and, instead, we have one sixth of the world population suffering from hunger and malnutrition. While saying so, I am conscious of the significantly large number of people below poverty line in

INDIA

India. My government is committed to remove hunger and malnutrition from the country through various initiatives and further improve our agriculture to ensure adequate availability of foodgrains to all. We have decided to step up our efforts in this regard. We are also working on the details of a Right to Food legislation to ensure food security to our poor.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the hard work done by FAO and other experts in identifying various causes for the state of affairs, the impact of the food crisis and the economic crisis on poor, the advisory inputs of the High-Level Expert Forum on how to feed the World in 2050 and suggesting a constructive agenda to address the problem. I agree broadly with their conclusions. Though the number of hungry people has been increasing slowly even before the food and the economic crises, these crises have increased the number sharply. Though, the global cereal prices have been declining lately they are still significantly higher than they were in the past, and, may be rising again in view of the revival of the

INDIA

world economy and the consequent increase in energy and fertilizer prices, which are the major inputs for agriculture, leading to higher prices of foodgrains. The higher energy prices may also lead to higher demand for bio-fuel which may have adverse effect on food security.

Mr. Chairman, the factors that caused the food crisis in the first place continue to be present still. These include declining agricultural productivity, increasing population in most of the food insecure countries, limitations relating to major natural inputs such as land and water, higher-than-long-term-average frequency of floods and droughts possibly due to effects of climate change and inadequate investments in agricultural research and development particularly in research in crops which are of interest to the poor.

One of the fundamental reasons for the state of agriculture today is the inadequate attention given in national policies and budgets of many countries in the last two decades. Reversing the trend is not only desirable but

INDIA

essential for the developing countries. Why I emphasise this point is because, faced with economic crisis, Governments generally tend to reduce investments in agriculture despite clear evidence that investment in agriculture and rural development is the most powerful engine for growth and addressing poverty and hunger. There is, therefore, an immediate need for giving agriculture the priority it deserves through substantial increase in investment. As investments by public sector alone may not be adequate, we need conducive public policies for encouraging investments by private sector. Increasing investments will not only ensure agriculture and rural growth and address poverty and hunger, but, will go a long way in making food deficient countries self sufficient in meeting their requirements. The international community may facilitate these efforts by food deficient countries by according priority to agriculture in official development assistance and in lending portfolios of International financial institutions. The Maputo declaration for raising share of agriculture in national

INDIA

budgets to at least 10%, of national budgets is welcome and needs replication by other geographical regions.

Mr. Chairman, despite lower cereal production, the outlook for world cereal supply and demand situation in 2009-10 is considered satisfactory. There is, however, no room for complacency. The declining productivity of major cereals has been a cause of concern particularly in the context of increasing population and declining availability of major inputs such as land and water. Increasing productivity in a sustainable manner is, therefore, a compulsion. Therefore, increasing investments in rural infrastructure, agricultural research & development and transferring the latest technology to farmers effectively to enhance production and productivity is a must. Here, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and the National Agricultural Research Systems have a special responsibility to not only come up with effective knowledge based solutions but to ensure their quickest possible dissemination among farmers, particularly

INDIA

small holder, through innovative delivery mechanisms. The farmers also need to be empowered to cope up with the challenges of uncertainty of weather, induced by climate change, for ensuring sustainability and further improvement.

Climate change is also altering the distribution, incidence and intensity of animal and plant pests and diseases and may also result in new transmission modalities and different species. Considering that pests, pathogens and weeds cause loss of more than 40 percent of world's food supply and huge economic losses, there is an urgent need for collective and effective action with the help of latest knowledge available with all International and national research organizations. Top priority needs to be given to build capacity of national veterinary and plant health services of developing countries as well as border control and enhancing their preparedness to ensure effective prevention and control of animal and plant pests and diseases.

INDIA

Mr. Chairman, as our experience has revealed producing enough is not adequate. We need to find effective distribution mechanisms to ensure that the underprivileged can exercise their right to food. We need to give serious thought to some practical mechanisms such as establishment of regional and global physical reserves as suggested in the background papers. Our experience of holding national reserves in the form of buffer stocks and the Regional Food Reserve under the SAARC umbrella has been extremely helpful in not only ensuring adequate supplies of foodgrains for the people below poverty line but also in avoiding speculative behaviour and ensuring stability in prices of essential commodities. We will be happy to share our experience in this and other fields with international organizations and countries needing such expertise.

Mr. Chairman, I place on record my appreciation for the contribution made by the High Level Conference in June last year, the UN high level task force for the global food security

INDIA

crisis, the L'Aquila joint statements and the joint statement issued at Pittsburgh. All these events have facilitated the consensus visible in the summit declaration issued by us. The declaration lays down a very comprehensive action plan to eradicate hunger. What is now needed is synergy in implementation of this action plan. The international community is looking for meaningful cooperation among all UN agencies particularly among FAO, IFAD and WFP and International Financial agencies. There is, indeed, also, a need for much better understanding and coordination among Rome based and Washington based agencies if the comprehensive action plan we have decided is to be implemented effectively. At L'Aquila and Pittsburgh there was a commitment for raising \$ 20 billion for addressing the issue. The FAO estimates of \$ 30 billion per year to build rural infrastructure and increase agricultural productivity in the developing world to eradicate hunger and double food production should not be difficult to

INDIA

achieve given the resolve of international community to address the issue.

The time has come to demonstrate that together we can act on the promises made and make a difference to the lives of the hungry people of the world. Let us use this opportunity to strengthen the institutions and mechanisms which will work in harmony and deliver on the promises made.

Thank you.
