

Statement of His Excellency the
President Jalal Talabani, of the
Republic of Iraq,
to the World Summit on Food
Security, Rome, Italy.

Delivered by His Excellency
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- Your Excellency Mr. Chairman
- Distinguished Heads of States and Heads of Delegations
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to attend the World Summit on Food Security on behalf of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who conveys to you his sincere greetings and hopes the conference will present positive recommendations, commitments and outcomes, which can be implemented to ensure food for all mankind.

Right to food access and food security is absolutely necessary with obvious commitments required by States and Governments. However the rapid developments in economic and environmental spheres, as well as the recent financial turmoil have led to chronic imbalances in the market for food. This has caused great difficulties with an increasing number of people without access to adequate food and widespread hunger that is unprecedented in history.

In contrast to the initiatives outlined by the Millennium Goals, which reflected the commitment of world leaders to reduce the number of the world's hungry by half by 2015, the number of hungry people has actually increased by more than one billion people. Moreover the specter of hunger is cast over large numbers of people as a result of the deterioration of crop production and the weak financial capacity of many countries; especially developing countries.

Many of these countries have witnessed a large increase in population and have either fallen victim to the financial crisis that recently swept the globe, or as a result of global warming coupled with substantial scarcity of water resources upon which agriculture depends has led to a great disservice to the food markets in various regions, in many cases both.

Statistics given by the Food and Agriculture Organization show areas like the Middle East and North Africa have witnessed the largest relative increase in the number of hungry people in the world, which amounted to

13.5% of the population, which in reality means the addition of about 42 million people to the list of the hungry.

Mr. President:

Agriculture in our region, and in my country, Iraq, in particular, is almost entirely dependent on irrigation, which means there an abundance of Water Resources available for agriculture within season.

My country has the honour of laying the foundations of Human Civilization, and the basis for this was the two great Rivers, Tigris and Euphrates. The first civil laws included laws governing the organization and exploitation of water resources, which have helped to settle the ancient civilizations of Iraq: successive Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Islamic, through to the modern day.

In spite of the historical experience accumulated in the management of water, we find ourselves today in a real crisis of water resources. Ongoing shortages have significantly influenced agricultural production, and rapid degradation that has now turned Iraq from a source of food to an importer of more than 70% of its food needs.

Many factors have played in this transformation of a great imbalance in food security for Iraq, although we have achieved significant developments in terms of overcoming the previous' Governments focus on war, towards development and stability, unfortunately food security has not been achieved for all citizens.

According to figures from the World Food Program (WFP), there were approximately five million people facing food insecurity in Iraq in 2005, today statistics show less than one million people, still a large number, but in the current circumstances of our country, it is an achievement which should be acknowledged.

The Iraqi government has continued its funding for the ration card, which covers all the basic food needs of the population to ensure decent standards

of living, until the Iraqi economy recovers. The Iraqi government will soon have a comprehensive review of the mechanisms of this distribution system to raise the level of food independence. Its aims will be to help vulnerable social groups to market turmoil and food insecurity as well as activate the market for local food by relying on national products first before resorting to the international market for the purchase of food commodities.

After the relative improvement in the security situation, the Iraqi government has also launched the initiative for the advancement of large agricultural sectors and agricultural water. Considerable sums have been made available by the Iraqi Government to modernize the infrastructure for irrigation projects, for the financing of large and small enterprises through soft loans, and for the revitalization of the agricultural process to achieve better social development.

I would like to point out that the Iraqi government passed a law important to investment in 2006 to promote the local private sector and international involvement in the development of the economic sector in Iraq, through direct investment or in partnership with the public sector. The investment in projects of agriculture and land reclamation and development of livestock are at the forefront of the investment expected.

The limiting factor for agricultural development in our country is water; about 70% of the waters of Mesopotamia are from neighboring countries. This is a very sensitive issue in light of the policies for building large dams, and control and storage facilities in neighboring countries. Iraq has become a victim because it is a downstream State, and operational procedures of neighboring countries are not in agreement with Iraq. This leads to growing problems in the agricultural sector in Iraq and the food security required not being achieved.

The lack of agreement and partnership between the riparian States leads to the deliberate impoverishment of the agricultural sector due to control measures on water resources and the diversion of rivers and tributaries. This is contrary to the principles of international law for the equitable and reasonable utilization of water resources. It seriously damages downstream

countries and results in a threat to security and stability by acquisition of shares of another country's water resources. Therefore, Iraq supports international bilateral agreements and multilateral agreements with neighboring countries on the basis of common interests and foundations for sustainable development based on existing laws and international agreements.

Mr. President...

The region's need for investments in agriculture and water to achieve food security for the population in accordance with sustainable development is far less than military spending, which threatens peace and stability and creates conditions of poverty, hunger and destruction of economic and environmental systems. The problems afflicting the region can be solved rapidly if the political will is there and there are international mechanisms, experiences and treaties in cases of disagreements. These can contribute to developing the proper framework to resolve problems, whether it's sharing water or the fight against poverty and the elimination of hunger.

The predictions of climate change in our own region are worrying because all 21 mathematical models adopted to study the change (General Circulation Models) indicate that the basins of the Tigris and Euphrates will witness a shortage of the natural flow rate. This is a warning bell for the region as a whole, and with the impact on international waters, the solutions required to deal with the new conditions must be also be regional.

Mr. President...

We have followed with interest the activities of member states for the reform of the CFS (Committee on Food Security) and we support the transformation of the Commission into a leader, to improve levels of food security, to provide the conditions of production and marketing, to allow free competition and distance from speculation and illegal profits in order to achieve food security for all.

Access to adequate food is a human right and there should not be a threat to this right under any pretext.

We also strongly support the final declaration of the summit and our efforts will be to comply with it and work within the dictates of our obligations and we hope that all the parties present at this conference will keep to the provisions of this Declaration, including its principles and commitments.

Thank you