

Address of H.E. Mr. Shalom Simhon, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of the State of Israel (Fourth Draft) to the Plenary Session of the World Food Summit, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, November 16, 2009

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Participants in the Plenary Session of the World Food Summit,

We are gathered here thirteen years after the holding of the first summit which was intended to mobilize the international community to combat hunger, and six years before the target date, at which time the community is supposed to halve the extent of hunger from the original figure of 800 million people. And lo and behold, we have been informed that the number of those suffering from hunger has recently jumped to one billion persons.

In the second half of the twentieth century, following the establishment of the United Nations and within its framework the Food and Agriculture Organization, much was spoken about the fact that the central factor for the lack of food and the existence of hunger was the failings in the production process in various focal points around the globe. The international community and many countries have striven to improve the quality of production with no small measure of success. Much capital, professional know-how and research developments were mobilized with the aim of increasing food production and quality. The State of Israel participates in this overall effort by assisting for six decades already in the form of transfer of knowledge and technology to many countries in all the continents.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, it was increasingly felt that, despite a rise in capital investments in agriculture, in great measure also in the developing

countries, along with the introduction of advanced and efficient production methods and a genuine reduction in production failings, the final and overwhelmingly important goal of the total eradication of hunger has not yet been achieved. It was due to a widespread series of local and regional focal points of conflict that prevented the regular transfer and supply of food to various populations resulting in malnutrition and famine. Here, also, Israel mobilized itself many times alongside the international community and joined in giving emergency aid both in the supply of food and equipment and in the dispatch of experts and emergency teams.

In the last two decades, more factors have been added, some of them natural phenomena and some of them manmade, to those factors which already raise significant obstacles in supplying food to economic and political vulnerable populations. They unfortunately distance us even more from the apparently basic and fundamental goal, that is, suitable food in a sufficient quantity available to all.

A recurrent series of economic crises hit the financial markets, and they were accompanied by secondary aftershocks which hurt agricultural markets and exchanges. The price of many food products, the majority of them basic commodities such as rice, grains, milk powder and butter and oil crops, but also niche products such as special fruits and vegetables, were exposed to great fluctuations, firstly steep rises which resulted in speculative prices that prevented a sufficient food supply and later to huge drops which caused losses making it difficult for the farmers to finance the next season

Likewise, it was a matter this time of an increasing process of climate change expressed by unstable weather conditions in various spots of the globe, which led, inter alia, to a substandard and insufficient amount of precipitation necessary for agricultural crops and orderly food production. In reality, these phenomena created real

difficulties to the farmers who had to cope with them using the usual methods of growing.

Israel, which has faced since its establishment under harsh climatic and geo-political constraints, developed over the years a range of agricultural technological means which assist greatly in overcoming these phenomena. Our country, a significant portion of which is desert and consequently in the other part the population density is among the highest in the world, produces milk in heat stress conditions and uses simple and inexpensive cooling systems to ease the heat. At the same time, we reach record yields in those products while supplying protein and additional nutritional elements to the population at reasonable prices and in regular quantities.

Likewise, we have developed an intensive production in greenhouses of vegetables for consumption, putting into operation heat and humidity control systems both in the hot summer and the winter. Israel also has developed and even disseminated throughout the world efficient irrigation equipment and systems for orchards and field crops which enable a given quantity of water to increase several times over yields of vegetables and fruits and thus to supply nutritional elements, vitamins and fibers which are enough for the consumption needs of the Israeli population and a significant surplus remains for export purposes. These irrigation systems are capable also of relieving stress and reducing damage in orchards due to weather phenomena like frost.

Crop output per cubic meter of water in Israel quadrupled from 1950's until now. Moreover, the State of Israel also succeeded in transferring a significant part of its plant production to the use of recycled water of quality, and thus providing a response both to the severe lack of water and to the subject of environment protection.

And indeed, the care for environmental concerns in the agricultural sector, in farm lands and in agricultural production installations in Israel has improved beyond

recognition through structural reforms and the introduction of new technologies. Dairy herd sheds and poultry houses for broilers are now in closed facilities which prevent the free flow of waste and do not harm the environment and groundwater. The sludge obtained in them is used for producing renewable energy.

Closed systems have been installed in vegetable greenhouses in which solutions flow for the purposes of irrigating and fertilizing crops. These solutions do not pollute the environment and groundwater. The fertilizers are reused in the greenhouses, after filtering and purifying the fertilizer solutions in installations in these closed systems.

In recent years, the State of Israel developed a whole insurance set-up against natural damages and disasters in the form of government support. These instruments of insurance enable the farmers to manage prudently the entire range of dangers to which agriculture is exposed, thus ensuring the regular production of the various kinds of agricultural produce.

Israel is ready and willing to put also in the service and for the benefit of the international community whose representatives are presently gathered here all of the know-how, experience, expertise and technologies the country has developed in recent years in order to streamline agricultural production and to make it more resistant to the effects of bad and unstable weather.

Throughout my terms in office as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development I've been keeping a daily and ongoing relationship with our friends in the Palestinian Authority, both in the West Bank and in Gaza. It takes place either in peace time or even during conflicts.

I've been taking care personally and continuously, on a daily basis, for the transfer of food supplies and fresh agricultural produce of all kinds into the Gaza Strip, inter alia cattle, vegetables, fruits, milk etc.! We try to meet all

the requests. Consequently, I would like to point out and to assure you - there is no situation of hunger in Gaza and the WFP confirms it.

Likewise I am constantly engaged in providing assistance relating to veterinary and phyto-sanitary issues. Many of the Gaza farmers know my personal cell-phone and contact me to ask for my help concerning various matters.

I use to do that having a profound belief and being confident that peace will eventually last here. The Minister of Defense as well as the Prime Minister fully supports me with that respect.

In order to confer on how to deal with the great mission of finding a solution to the distress of food scarcity amongst nearly one-fifth of the world's population, Israel supports the FAO's initiative to set up a taskforce which will operate ceaselessly and continuously as a coordinated and synchronized staff headquarters activity of all the assistance and international cooperation organizations existing in many countries, including the Center for International Cooperation ("Mashav") in Israel's Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Agriculture and Rural Development.

Israel proposed to the UN to establish a joint international center for Agricultural Extension, Capacity Building and Rural Development, for Africa and the Middle East.

Israel is willing to provide its expertise, its capacities and its various facilities and will be more than happy to cooperate with any international body that will be interested in taking part in this new initiative.

I hereby repeat my call to the United Nations and in particular the FAO to take advantage of all the know-how and goodwill existing in these frameworks to make a coordinated worldwide effort to relieve and even eradicate this harsh reality - hunger - which is as old as mankind itself.

Thank you very much to all of you.

