



WORLD SUMMIT ON FOOD SECURITY- 18 November 2009

Remarks by Dr. EMILE FRISON, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF BIOVERSITY INTERNATIONAL (check against delivery)

Mr Chairman, Your Excellencies, Honourable Heads of States, Distinguished delegates:

I am speaking to you today as Director General of Bioversity International, one of the 15 agricultural research centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

We need to recognise that a more food secure world requires both short and long-term investments. The world has responded well to the emergencies that face it, but reliable long-term investments – which will help to reduce the need for emergency interventions in future – have been much more difficult to mobilize.

I welcomed the pledges made at the High Level Conference here last June and more recently the increased investments that world leaders agreed at L'Aquila. I have also been pleased to hear many speakers here -- starting with the UN Secretary General himself -- refer to the absolutely central role of smallholder farmers.

These are the people on whom food security depends, and we need to invest in them.

Any discussion of increasing food security needs to look at it in all its dimensions. Too often policies talk about the quantity of food -- is there enough? -- without also talking about the quality -- is it good, nutritious food?

Food security is about the dietary needs and food preferences of people, so that they have access to a diet that enables them to live an active and healthy life. And yet, even in developing countries that are not suffering acute hunger, we are seeing a simplification of diets associated with an explosion in the incidence of diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity and cancers, an explosion that makes a mockery of the phrase "diseases of affluence".

These are not diseases of affluence. They are diseases of poverty, the poverty of diets that are energy rich but nutrient poor, that contain enough calories and protein, maybe even too much, and yet lack the essential vitamins and other micronutrients essential for a healthy life.

Food security requires us to diversify agriculture to ensure balanced diets that meet peoples' needs.

Diversified agriculture brings other benefits too. It makes smallholder farming more sustainable. Efforts to increase production, which have been vitally important, have so far been based on simplified systems that depend on a few varieties of even fewer crops. They require massive injections of energy-dependent inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides. These simplified systems are vulnerable to shocks and are intrinsically unsustainable.

We need to create resilient systems that do not overly depend on energy-requiring inputs.

Another benefit. Not only are diversified farming systems more sustainable, they also reduce the vulnerability of poor farmers. They minimize the risk of catastrophic harvest failures caused by droughts or floods, by extremes of

temperature and by outbreaks of pests and diseases, all of which will be exacerbated by climate change.

Most smallholder farmers seek to minimise risks, not to maximise productivity. Diverse farming systems help them to do so.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, if we want to diminish the impact of future emergencies, we need to change our paradigm and invest in the agricultural research and development that will deliver intensification without simplification. We need locally adapted models based on agro-ecological principles and making full use of a wide range of crop and livestock diversity.

I should point out that this is not a return to old-style farming. It embraces scientific research to deliver both higher harvests and greater sustainability with all the benefits I outlined a moment ago.

I urge developing countries and donor countries alike to embrace this opportunity and to significantly increase their investments in research and development based on this new paradigm. That will deliver true food security.

Madam Chairman, I am also pleased to report that the reform of the CGIAR will be completed in two weeks time. The reinvigorated CGIAR should be supported to deliver on the challenge of food security and climate change and to play an active role in reformed Committee on World Food Security.

I thank you for your attention.