



20 February 2013

**LAUNCH OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF QUINOA
HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION**

Your Excellency Mr Chair of the Second Committee,
George Talbot, Permanent Representative of Guyana,
Nadine Heredia Alarcón de Humala, First Lady of Peru,
Your Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Plurinational State of Bolivia,
Your Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs of Peru,
Your Excellency Minister of Agriculture of Bolivia and
Your Excellency Minister of Agriculture of Peru,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to start by thanking the President of Bolivia Evo Morales and First Lady Nadine Heredia for agreeing to serve as FAO Special Ambassadors for the International Year of Quinoa. Their voice will help raise awareness of the contribution this extraordinary food can give to global food security.

The slogan of this international year tells us: a future sown a thousand years ago.



As we confront the challenge of producing enough nutritious food to feed the world's population now and in the future, we have a lot to learn from the past.

Quinoa and other traditional, often-forgotten crops, offer alternative sources of nutrition for those countries suffering from food insecurity. This is the case for Yemen, an arid country with highlands similar to those of Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. During my last trip to that country, I agreed with the Minister of Agriculture to start a local experiment with quinoa cultivation under FAO assistance. We are prepared to repeat this in other countries that request FAO assistance.

This is particularly important in the context of climate change, in the context of rising and volatile food prices in international commodity markets, and in the context of changing diets which are leading to growing rates of obesity in different parts of the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

FAO estimates that some seven thousand species of plants have been cultivated or consumed as food throughout history.

Today the staple diet for more than one-third of humanity is based on a handful of foods: cereals, (wheat, soybean, maize, rice), potato and cassava.

Many of the species that we used to consume are disappearing. Retrieving traditional foods is a way of providing nutritional alternatives to poor people in the world.

When we lose food varieties we also lose genetic diversity. So retrieving those varieties is also conserving biodiversity.



If we lose these unique and irreplaceable resources, it will be more difficult for us to adapt to climate change and ensure a healthy and varied diet for all.

Retrieving traditional foods such as quinoa also means revitalizing cultures and livelihoods that have been forgotten over the years.

There are two paradoxes for quinoa today. First, that a staple food for the poorest populations of the Andes should have become a highly appreciated gourmet food in the most developed centres of the world. Second, that a traditional food going back many years in history should have become a source of hope for the food security of the whole of humanity because of the impacts of climate change.

We must increase consumption so that more quinoa is produced and becomes a staple food for the peoples of all continents. FAO is ready to help countries that wish to introduce quinoa into their diets and also as producers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today the cultivation of quinoa has expanded beyond the Andean region, as other countries discover its versatility and nutritional richness.

We hope the activities planned for 2013 and beyond will be a catalyst for increased sustainable production and consumption of quinoa globally.

Greater international cooperation and partnerships among the private sector, governments, the UN system, regional banks such as the Inter-American Development Bank, civil society, cooperatives and other groups are key to these efforts.



In the session following this Panel, we will be presenting a detailed plan of work for the International Year of Quinoa.

The Master Plan for the implementation of the International Year of Quinoa that will be presented in the next session by FAO lays the ground for our joint action.

This is a collaborative effort that requires the commitment of us all. But its successful implementation also requires resources.

In this regard, we encourage your contributions to the IYQ Trust Fund being set up to support the various activities planned throughout the year.

By working together and cultivating the wisdom of our ancestors, who sowed the first seeds thousands of years ago, I am confident that we can all reap the benefits of a food and nutrition secure future.

Thank you.