



07 December 2012

ROME MEETING ON THE SAHEL

WELCOMING STATEMENT BY THE FAO DIRECTOR-GENERAL

I would like to welcome you all to FAO. It is a pleasure for us to offer our facilities for this meeting.

Let me say also that it is a privilege for me to welcome Mr Romano Prodi and your team to FAO Headquarters in your role as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Sahel.

In the Sahel, one in four people face devastating threats to their livelihoods. These include: conflict and population displacement, high food- and farm-input prices, locust outbreaks, the depletion of natural resources, erratic climate, and other shocks that affect people's capacity to live and to cope.

Most of those affected are farmers and livestock keepers who depend directly on natural resources to survive.

During the 2012 crisis in the Sahel, over one billion euros were mobilized. These will help to address urgent humanitarian and life-saving needs, and we are glad to say that famine has been averted.



But this is not enough. It is essential to step up support and also combine short-term humanitarian responses with longer-term development actions. We need to make livelihoods more resilient.

And we need to ensure that our interventions in different areas – food security, agriculture, health, education and security – are as integrated as possible. FAO is committed to working more and better with you, and under African leadership, to promote sustainable development in the Sahel.

I recently returned from a trip to the Niger. What I saw was encouraging.

It convinced me that there is hope; that there is political will to reverse the negative trends leading to food insecurity in the region.

Governments and their partners can make progress if they have the political will and adequate resources. The “Nigerians Nourish Nigerians” Initiative (3N Initiative), in Niger, promoted by the country’s President Mahamadou Issoufou is one such example.

Let me stress here that investing in food security in the Sahel is also an investment in a peaceful and more stable future. There is a clear linkage between hunger and conflict; food security and peace in Africa.

In different countries in the world, and the same is true in the Sahel, we are seeing how food insecurity, hunger, and the dispute over natural resources cause conflict.



Hunger can both trigger conflict and be a result of conflict. So we cannot treat food security as being separate from security and development as a whole.

FAO is confident that the Special Envoy and his team will play a vital role in improving resilience in the Sahel. You can count on our full support to meet the development needs of the Sahel.

Thank you.