
CFS-led Intergovernmental Negotiations on the
Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land,
Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security
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Statement by José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the Food and
Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Mr Yaya Olaniran, Chairman of the CFS,
Permanent Representatives,
Representatives of civil society, the private sector,
Ladies and Gentleman.

We have today all the resources necessary to assure the right to food for the world's entire population, but over 920 million people suffer from hunger.

And, according to FAO's latest estimates, even if we increase total agricultural output by 60%, which should be enough to feed the 9 billion people in the world in 2050, we would still have over 300 million people living in food insecurity because of inadequate access to food.

So, we have the challenge to ensure that not a single child, woman or man goes hungry, today and in the future. And we need to do this in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable way.

When I say "we", I mean not only FAO and other international agencies. When I say "we", I mean civil society, the private sector, academia, other institutions and governments. We all need to be involved if we are to end hunger and implement the right to food in the world.

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security play an important part in answering this challenge.

Land and other natural resources provide a platform for livelihoods and a basis for social, cultural and religious practices. Pressure on these resources is increasing as new areas are cultivated, occupied by urban extension and abandoned because of degradation, climate change and conflicts.

In setting out principles and internationally accepted standards, the Voluntary Guidelines intend to provide practical guidance to states, civil society and the private sector on responsible governance of tenure.

Finding consensus on this matter is not an easy task, so I want to publically recognize the commitment and the effort of all the participating actors, and the

importance that governments, civil society and the private sector are giving to this. Everyone is looking for us to succeed. Each one has a role to play in this process that begins with the approval of these guidelines. This will be a starting point to look ahead.

FAO's mandate includes providing a neutral forum so that countries can discuss such subjects, and we are pleased to support these CFS-led negotiations.

I share the wish expressed by FAO's Member States during the last sessions of the CFS and of the FAO Council, that these negotiations be concluded this week.

In the previous negotiating rounds, substantive progress was made, leaving less than thirty percent of the document still under discussion. Hopefully, we can find consensus this week. We need to find consensus this week.

Many countries are already debating, implementing or revisiting national laws and policies related to the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests. These Voluntary Guidelines should help strengthen national policy processes and inspire other countries, building on national and regional initiatives that might already exist, such as the recently adopted Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa.

It is important to stress that the Voluntary Guidelines being discussed today do not establish legally binding obligations or replace existing national or international laws, treaties or agreements. Although voluntary in nature, they have the potential to give a significant contribution to food security and to the sustainable development and use of natural resources.

They offer governments a point of reference to develop their own national policies; and also for FAO, this will be the basis of our policy advice.

I have also been encouraging the private sector, in different meetings I had in the World Economic Forum in Davos and on other occasions, to use these Guidelines as a benchmark for their own activities and especially for those activities they want to do with FAO's support.

FAO will use the Voluntary Guidelines as the baseline for our partnerships. I have started an open-door policy with the private sector, civil society and cooperatives, and others, and we are opening liaison office spaces for them in our Headquarters.

Let me stress that we want to work together with partners that share a common vision and principles. The Voluntary Guidelines will be this base. Once approved, they will provide this common view and, when we discuss partnerships, we will take into consideration whether our potential partners have endorsed them.

They will also be an important tool for NGOs and CSOs to advocate for improved governance of land tenure.

There is another point I want to highlight: the importance, in my view, of having included civil society and the private sector in this debate that has taken place around the world, including in electronic consultations.

I think that, today, all of us recognize the added value that this participatory approach brings to the debate. We recognize the contribution different actors have to give and we understand and respect the diversity of opinions that are being expressed.

This is a welcome dialogue. It is important to the discussion of the Voluntary Guidelines, but it also goes beyond that. This dialogue is necessary to face all challenges we have related to food security and rural development.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have made important progress until now. There is still some ground to cover, but I hope a consensus can be reached. In fact, I believe we are obliged to achieve consensus.

I count on your commitment to find the common ground we need to approve these Voluntary Guidelines. This is an important contribution, and should be seen as an important step we need to move forward.

Thank you very much.