



11 June 2012

144th Session of the FAO Council

Opening statement of the Director-General of FAO

Independent Chairperson of the Council, Mr. Luc Guyau,
His Excellency Cau Duc Phat, Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development of
Vietnam, Chairperson of the Regional Conference for Asia,
His Excellency Ismat Abasov, Minister for Agriculture of Azerbaijan, Chairperson of the
Regional Conference for Europe,
His Excellency Rigobert Maboundou, Minister for Agriculture and Livestock of the
Republic of Congo, Chairperson of the Regional Conference for Africa,
His Excellency Ambassador Hassan Janabi, Permanent Representative of Iraq,
representing the Minister for Agriculture of Iraq, Chairperson of the Regional
Conference for the Near East,
His Excellency Mr Lorenzo Basso, Secretary of State for Agriculture of Argentina,
Chairperson of the Regional Conference for Latin America,
Distinguished Ministers,
Members of the Council,
Colleagues of FAO and UN agencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address this Council for the first time as your Director-General.

These first months in office, setting the Organization on a renewed course, have been a busy, challenging and fruitful time.



So far, I have discussed our common challenges with Permanent Representatives, Ministers and Presidents from over 130 countries.

And I have met a large number of partners: international agencies, regional bodies, private sector, civil society and non-governmental organizations and cooperatives.

I have been on mission to 15 countries, seeing first-hand the work we do in the field.

As you know, it is different to see things with your own eyes than to read or see a video about them. I encourage Members to visit our field projects to better understand the importance of FAO assistance.

Of these travels, let me highlight my mission to Somalia. It marked the first time a Director-General of FAO stepped in the country. It was a sign of my commitment to ending hunger and scaling up our assistance to the most food insecure nations.

In Somalia, a combination of good rains and the coordinated and dedicated efforts of the international community, including the work FAO did with our sister agency World Food Programme and UNICEF, allowed us to overcome famine conditions in only six months.

However, those gains are still fragile. We need a sustained effort to prevent the repetition of such a tragedy. We cannot avoid droughts, but we can put in place measures to prevent them from becoming famines.

During this first semester, we have also organized five successful Regional Conferences, which are now an integral part of FAO's Governing Bodies.



These Regional Conferences had a record high-level of attendance. I thank all Countries for their participation.

The reports of each Conference will be presented at this Council by their respective presidents. They are ministers and high-level authorities that will serve as presidents until the next regional conference cycle in 2014.

We have been able to advance on important administrative issues during these first months, contributing to the more efficient Organization we all want. For the sake of time, I will not list them here.

But I can assure Members that we continue to look for more efficiency gains and ways to streamline our work to get better value for money.

We have also advanced on substantive issues related to our core mission to eradicate hunger.

Let me mention just one of the battles we won together: the endorsement by the Committee of World Food Security of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security.

It is a breakthrough agreement that was negotiated during three years by governments, civil society and private sector. It provides us a starting point to improve the lives of rural populations and fisher folk around the world.

I call upon our partners to express their support to these guidelines; and I reaffirm to Governments that FAO is ready to assist in their implementation.



Ladies and gentlemen,

At this session you will discuss issues that will determine FAO's future capacity to contribute to a food-secure world. They include decentralization, further adjustments to the Programme of Work and Budget, and FAO's strategic direction.

These issues reflect my vision for FAO, based on the five pillars of my campaign that I first presented to the Council in April 2011.

Last December, I addressed you again, this time as your Director-General Elect. What I laid out to you then is exactly what I have been working on since January.

First, working in an open and transparent matter, informing and consulting Members and the Governing Bodies, formally and informally.

Second, strengthening partnerships. We are doing this by increasing collaboration with the Rome-based Agencies and other UN, international and regional partners. And by implementing an "open-door" policy in FAO to welcome civil society and private sector organizations that share our vision of a world without hunger.

Third, adding a bottom-up approach to our traditional planning, incorporating the suggestions of the Regional Conferences in the proposals that you are discussing.

Ladies and gentlemen,



The transformational change process I started will allow FAO to respond to the challenges the world is facing today, make the organization more efficient and more focused, and improve our performance, results and impact.

Transformational change includes a strategic thinking process that has led to the outline of the reviewed strategic framework, which you will discuss in this Session.

We have already identified 11 global trends and seven challenges.

From these trends and challenges we looked at the comparative advantages of FAO and, then, derived five crosscutting Strategic Objectives. They represent a major break from our current set of objectives, prepared years ago, that basically replicates FAO's existing structures.

We seek your guidance on these proposed five Strategic Objectives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Decentralization is an important aspect of FAO Reform. There is now a consensus that it is possible to strengthen our decentralized offices without weakening technical capacity and normative work at Headquarters. And that both are relevant and complementary.

And I am extremely pleased to note that, at its last session, the Joint Meeting of the Program and Finance Committees agreed to the proposal you are being presented for discussion and decision.



Support came from the G77 plus China and OECD countries alike, setting aside the traditional divisions that frequently exist between them.

I also want to highlight that, as I promised at the last Council session, this decentralization proposal does not cost one extra cent to the Organization.

We have identified additional efficiency savings in our current Programme of Work and Budget that will allow us to strengthen decentralized offices and update our strategic planning and monitoring capacities and bolster multidisciplinary technical activities.

The efficiency savings identified to implement these proposals amount to a total of just two percent of our approved budget. It is a very small amount, especially when compared to what we can achieve with it.

Looking at this number should make us consider whether we have been making a tempest in a teacup over these last months.

Let's recognize that the real problem is the lack of trust that remains on the part of some Countries. I am doing my best to provide you all the information requested, hoping that transparency will help solve this pending issue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One part of the further adjustments to the Programme of Work and Budget includes a revision of the Organization's structure, as requested by the Immediate Plan of Action, the well-known IPA in FAO's dialect.



At this session, we are proposing adjustments to the Office of Corporate Communications and External Relations and to the Human Resources Management Division.

I want to briefly address the proposed review of our human resources structure, as some Members have expressed concern about this.

The Independent External Evaluation, IEE, that FAO undertook in 2007 recommends:

“The modernization of Human Resources Management Division to make it less a process facilitator and more of a strategic partner, building human resources strategies and advising and supporting senior management”.

The proposal I am making is in line with the importance the IEE and Members give to the human resources function, also recognized in the IPA.

It is also an integral part of the transformational change I am promoting and which the Program and Finance Committee endorsed at its last meeting just a few days ago.

You elected me to lead this Organization. You gave me a mandate for change. To make these changes, Management needs to be able to manage human resources, which are FAO's greatest asset, properly.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Bridging the divide between developed and developing countries that has prevailed in the past and regaining the trust of all Members - and I highlight



this – all Member Countries in the Organization are among my main concerns.

As I told Council in December, and I quote again:

"One symptom of this lack of trust has been the increased time that Member Countries spend looking into many details that do not correspond to the role of guidance expected from Governing Bodies. Rebuilding trust must be based on the recognition that we – the Member Countries and the Secretariat – have shared goals and complementary responsibilities, as clearly established in our Constitution".

The support you have given to the proposals I presented, and the frank conversations we have had along the way, make me believe we are succeeding in rebuilding trust.

I don't expect us to agree on everything, always.

I need and expect from you guidance and the freedom to manage the Organization in my own style, within the limits and with the accountability established by our basic texts.

Article Seven of FAO's Constitution states:

"Subject to the general supervision of the Conference and the Council, the Director-General shall have full power and authority to direct the work of the Organization".

This is not about concentrating power. This is about being responsible and accountable to Members for all of FAO's work.



Let me remind you that I proposed a set of procedures that, if approved by Members, would limit the room for action that Directors-General, including myself, have during the transition period, something neglected in the past.

As you have had the opportunity to note, my management style values corporate action, teamwork, bottom-up initiatives, partnerships, streamlining and timely action.

And I assess managers and staff members by the work they do and not by the post they have.

In the spirit of FAO's global mandate I see no Brazilian, no American, no Italian, no French, no Chinese, no Canadian, but only International Civil Servants.

The two Deputy Directors-General, DDGs in FAO's dialect, have been given specific instructions to take the lead in several crosscutting actions in the operational and knowledge arms of this Organization.

I want them to act as coordinators in their areas, not as one more and unnecessary, layer in the Organization.

The Assistant Directors-General, or ADGs in our dialect, have been instructed to do precisely that: assist me in their capacity as heads of the different departments and regional offices of FAO.

That's why all ADGs have now direct access to me, as do the DDGs.

I ask you not to waste time debating over my style, nor to get involved in micromanagement. That is Secretariat business!



Judge me by the proposals I am making and by the results of my work. Let's use our meeting to discuss the important challenges we have in front of us. I need your guidance on the best way to face them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The current situation in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa is a daily reminder of how critical the food security situation in the world still is. And should make us ask ourselves why, in a world with sufficient food, over 900 million people still suffer from hunger.

I know these are difficult economic times for all of us, but, in the end, the choices we make are political choices. I thank those countries that place Africa and food security among their top priorities, and urge others to do the same.

Likewise, I call on developing countries to step up their cooperation as well. In this regard, I want to recall that, at the request of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa and the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, the Secretariat is detailing proposals for regional food security trust funds to be funded, primarily, by countries and the private sector of the affected regions.

And despite the dark clouds of the financial crises, there is good news that I would like to share with you. Food prices began to fall in face of the good harvests and increase in stocks. That means that we should expect a reduction in the number of hungry people in the world in 2012.

Ladies and gentlemen,



From the meetings that I have had with you here in Rome, at the Regional Conferences and during my travels, I know that I can count on the fullest support of most of the FAO Members to implement the actions that you elected me for.

Our Organization has an enormously important role to play in the world. We need to be prepared to continue to adjust the ways in which we operate. I look forward to continue working closely with you and all the Member Countries that you represent.

Let me close as I did in my two previous statements to the Council, recalling that: "I will not be able to do anything except what we can do together."

I wish you fruitful deliberations. Thank you for your attention.