



*14 November 2012*

*International Conference on Food Security in Drylands*

*Doha, QATAR*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and honored to be here. I would like to thank the Government of Qatar and the Qatar National Food Security Program for organizing this conference.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reaffirm FAO's commitment to work with the regional and international community to promote food security in dryland countries.

Natural resources degradation in dryland countries threatens more than two billion people.

The food security challenge in dryland countries is clearly shown in the hunger figures released in October by FAO, IFAD and WFP.

According to the State of Food Insecurity in the World, we are making progress in the fight against hunger. The number of undernourished people fell from one billion in 1990-1992 to 868 million in 2010-2012.

However, we are losing the battle against hunger in Africa and the Near East.

Between the early nineties and today the number of hungry people increased by 83 million in Africa and the Near East to a total of 275 million.

Different reasons help explain this:



- First, conflict. Conflict disrupts food production and causes hunger. And hunger and disputes over agriculture cause conflicts, in relationships that do not respect national borders. Last year's famine in Somalia, and the flux of refugees from Libya and Mali to countries in the Sahel and from Somalia to Yemen, are examples of this.
- Second, recurrent droughts that are becoming more extreme and frequent with climate change.
- And, third, high and volatile food prices. Arab countries alone import at least 50 percent of the food they consume.

We need to address these issues to advance towards food security in dryland countries. There are many measures to be taken.

- First, we need to improve the information we have on drylands, to support the sustainable management of land and water resources.
- Second, we need to scale up the sustainable intensification of agriculture and adapt production to climate change. At FAO, we call this approach "Save and Grow."
- Third, we need to build resilience in rural communities. This means acting not only in response to short term needs but also with a long term perspective. That is the only way to break the cycle of hunger. To do this, we need to increase responsible investments in agriculture and rural development in line with more comprehensive food security policies and programs.
- And, fourth, we need to strengthen global food security governance.



Fortunately, we are learning that in the globalized world we live in we cannot have food security in only one country or in one region. We are also learning that droughts or floods are not what cause famine and crises, it's the lack of local food security policies and global governance.

We have taken steps to improve governance. The most important one is the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), that now includes representatives from civil society and private sector. The CFS is a foundation we should build on.

Perhaps the most pressing issue being debated today is investments in agriculture.

At this meeting, FAO will promote the debate. Together, we will look at what we need to do to make sure that investments are sustainable and responsible, that is, that they respect the rights, livelihoods and resources of all those involved, especially the most vulnerable. Your comments will be a valuable input to the discussions on the principles responsible for agricultural investments which are starting in the framework of the Committee on World Food Security.

In the debates we are having here in Qatar we will also look at the specific land and water investment development requirements for each country of the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the Rio+20 Sustainable Development Conference held last June, the world sent out a clear message that development will not be sustainable while hundreds of millions continue to be excluded, suffering from hunger and extreme poverty.



If we can find sustainable ways to ensure food security in dryland areas, then we will be well on our way to achieving a “zero hunger” world.

I am confident that the debates in this conference will help us advance in this direction.

Thank you.