



*21 May 2013*

## **Young Professionals Conference: Innovative Ideas to Feed the World Opening Speech**

I want to thank the organizers Cynthia Lima, Rebecca de Souza, Wenjun Luo and Tomasso Carboni for inviting me to this event and thank our colleagues from IFAD, WFP and FAO for being here.

It is very encouraging to see so many young faces at FAO and we are working to have more young professionals in the organization.

So it is a great pleasure to welcome all of you here. There least two things that we share and which bring us together today.

First, the certainty that we can guarantee the food security of every human being. And second, our willingness to do our part to make this happen.

I am convinced that ending hunger is a possible goal in one generation. It's extremely important not to lose this opportunity. Losing the battle against hunger means losing one generation. We cannot let that happen.

We can end hunger, but we need to work for that.

We need to adapt the way we work. The problems the world faces today are different from those of the past. The issues we will deal with in 20, 30 years will also be different.

If we are to succeed in reaching our goal of a hunger-free and sustainable world, we need to understand and respond to the causes of hunger today.

When FAO was created after World War II for instance, the main barrier to food security was insufficient production. Well, today, there is enough food for everyone and food availability has increased by over 40 percent per capita in the last 50 years or so.



And yet, nearly 870 million people still suffer from hunger. The main reason for this is that, today, hunger is caused by insufficient access. People do not have the means to produce the food they need or the money to buy it.

We also need to work together to end hunger. It will only be possible with the commitment of everyone. It is a society that decides to eradicate hunger – not the government, not an international organization, not an NGO or the private sector.

I am sure that you've heard this before. But what we are doing now is acting on this. Finding and implementing ways to work better with others, complementing and coordinating our work.

Young professionals can bring about the changes we need to win the fight against hunger by helping to find answers that respond to the problems that we face today and not those of the past, by being willing to roll up one's sleeves and get to work, and by bringing a much more open and participatory approach that is essential to working in partnerships.

Most important, young professionals bring the energy, the breath of fresh air that we need to move forward.

This is essential because, in many cases, young minds are walking into bureaucratic organizations with old mindsets.

What can these organizations offer to you? Well, I truly believe that today all of us understand that change is necessary. Many organizations are trying to implement the changes.

It's not always an easy process, but no true transformation is painless. It involves soul-searching; it involves changing ways of working that sometimes have been in place for one's entire professional life.

But if we make this change happen I am convinced we will be giving concrete contributions to ending hunger. So that is what we have to offer to you: the opportunity for you to be a part of this change, to make this change happen.

This meeting, organized by young professionals for young professionals, fits in very well with this proposal.

Before coming to FAO in 2006, I spent over 35 years teaching at universities. I know the potential that lies in youth and it gives me pride to see how many of my students have grown to give significant contributions to food security and rural development.



You are part of another generation of young professionals that has the power to use all of your talent and knowledge to create the better world that we want.

This event brings in three important ideas: young professionals – innovative ideas – feeding the world. These are three ideas that are not always connected. The biggest contribution you can give is to bring them together.

I want to congratulate you all for participating in this effort and, in particular, the authors of the ideas that will be shared at this meeting. And I am sure it will lead to constructive and interesting debates. I look forward to learning about the outcomes of your discussions.

Thank you very much.