

HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY: THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIOENERGY

Committee of the Whole: Agenda Item 5.4

Roundtable 4: Bioenergy and Food Security

Wednesday, 4 June 2008

Co-Chairs Report

The Roundtable was opened by the Chair of the Committee of the Whole, His Excellency Henri Djombo, Minister of Forest Economy, Congo. The Co-Chairs were Her Excellency Gerda Verburg, Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the Netherlands and His Excellency Guillermo Salazar Nicolau, Minister for Agricultural Development, Panama.

The panellists were Mr Pat Mooney, Executive Director of the Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration, Ms Anne-Ruth Herkes, Vice President, Policy and Strategic Issues of BP Biofuels and Mr Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, Executive Director of The Rural Hub, West Africa. Mr Alexander Müller, Assistant Director General of the FAO Natural Resources Management and Environment Department, acted as Secretary.

Panellists and discussions from the floor reflected on the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between bioenergy and food security?
2. Should bioenergy be a central element in country strategies to address climate change?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities of the public sector, the private sector and civil society in ensuring that bioenergy is developed in a socially and environmentally friendly way?
4. Which challenges of bioenergy need to be addressed at the international level? Are there concrete steps the international community should take?

Her Excellency Gerda Verburg recalled the opportunities and risks related to bioenergy growth, and called for the development of worldwide sustainability criteria and indicators for bioenergy production, with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. His Excellency Guillermo Salazar Nicolau stressed the potential of bioenergy to contribute to economic and rural development especially in tropical countries, while noting the need to prioritise food production over energy production.

Ms Anne-Ruth Herkes stressed the importance of addressing food security and bioenergy in the context of climate change, and urged the international community to find consensus on sustainability standards for bioenergy. Mr Pat Mooney cautioned against the promotion of bioenergy, highlighting in particular the risk of reallocating land and water resources from food to energy production. Mr Ibrahim Assane Mayaki stressed the potential of modern bioenergy to contribute to the energy needs of developing countries, in particular in rural areas. He further highlighted the need to develop consistent policies for energy and

agriculture, which are focused on the needs of small scale farmers and rural communities, and called for the active participation of all stakeholders in the formulation process.

The Roundtable agreed on the significant potential of bioenergy to contribute to rural development, in particular in developing countries, both as a source of economic growth and as a provider of energy services. However, it was also stressed that bioenergy growth should be managed carefully. It was generally agreed that food security should be put before energy policy goals, and that measures should be taken to avoid competition between food and energy.

Several countries noted the sustainability challenges related to the production of first generation biofuels and highlighted the promise of second generation technologies to reduce competition for natural resources. The need for further investment in science and technology development, especially in developing countries, was highlighted. Several countries pointed towards the importance of sound policy frameworks and called for the establishment of international sustainability criteria and guidelines. The Roundtable welcoming in this context the FAO initiative to work towards an international consensus on sustainable biofuels, as described in the information paper on bioenergy (HLC/08/INF/3).