

***High-Level Conference on World Food Security:
the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy***

Rome, 3-5 June 2008

*Your Excellency, the President of the Italian Republic,
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Mr Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Distinguished Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We are gathered here in the eternal city of Rome for a *de jure* High-Level Conference that has become a *de facto* Summit. We have before us a world food crisis that has recently had tragic social and political consequences in different continents, with riots and deaths that can endanger world peace and security.

Those sad events are however but the chronicle of disaster foretold. In 1996, in this very chamber, 112 Heads of State and Government and the representatives of 186 Members of the Organization solemnly pledged to reduce by half the number of hungry in the world by the year 2015 and adopted a programme to achieve that target. But already in 2002, we had to convene a second world summit to draw the international community's attention to the fact that resources to finance agricultural programmes in developing countries were decreasing, instead of rising. With such a trend, the Summit target would not be reached in 2015, but in 2150. An "anti-hunger programme", with financial requirements estimated at 24 billion dollars per year, had been prepared for that meeting.

Today, the facts speak for themselves: from 1980 to 2005, aid to agriculture fell from 8 billion dollars (2004 basis) in 1984 to 3.4 billion dollars in 2004, representing a reduction in real terms of 58%. Agriculture's share of Official Development Assistance fell from 17% in 1980 to 3% in 2006. The international and regional financial institutions saw a drastic reduction in resources allocated to the activity that constitutes the principal livelihood of 70% of the world's poor. In one telling case, the loan portfolio to agriculture of one institution plummeted from 33% in 1979 to 1% in 2007.

In cooperation with FAO, the developing countries did in fact prepare policies, strategies and programmes that, if they had received appropriate funding, would have assured world food security.

Global food production must be doubled to feed a world population currently standing at 6 billion and expected to rise to 9 billion by 2050.

Thus, following a meeting of African experts in December 2001 in Rome, the Ministers for Agriculture met at the FAO Regional Conference for Africa in Cairo in February 2002, and again in Maputo just before the July 2003 African Union Summit. On that occasion, the Heads of State and Government adopted the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and its companion documents prepared with the support of FAO. The Programme requires an investment of 25 billion dollars per year for water control, rural infrastructure, trade capacity, increased crop production and reduced hunger, agricultural research and the dissemination of technology, animal production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture.

In this context, 51 African countries, with the support of FAO, prepared National Medium-Term Investment Programmes (NMTIPs) and Bankable Investment Project Profiles (BIPPs).

The Regional Economic Communities - UEMOA, ECOWAS, SADC, COMESA, IGAD and AMU - have, with FAO's support, also prepared regional food security programmes which focus on intra-regional trade and WTO sanitary and phytosanitary standards, based on the rules established by WHO and FAO for consumer protection in the framework of the Codex Alimentarius and the International Plant Protection Convention.

Following implementation of the pilot phases of national and regional food security programmes in the countries of CARICOM, Central and South America, the Ibero-American Summit approved in November 2006 in Montevideo, Uruguay, the Initiative "Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean by 2025".

Similar regional programmes were prepared, in cooperation with FAO, in Central Europe and Central Asia for the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Economic Cooperation Organization.

Plans, programmes and projects - well and good - therefore exist to address food security, even though they may require further refinement and updating.

But sadly the international community only reacts when the media beams the painful spectacle of world suffering into the homes of the wealthy countries.

Based on world agricultural statistics and the projections that FAO is responsible for preparing, already last September, I alerted public opinion to the risks of social and political unrest due to hunger. On 17 December 2007, to avoid jeopardizing the 2008 agricultural season, I launched an appeal for the mobilization of 1.7 billion dollars in grants to enable the farmers of poor countries to have access to the fertilizer, seeds and animal feed that had risen in price by 98, 72 and 60 percent, respectively. All in vain, despite broad press coverage and correspondence to the Member Nations and the financial institutions. Some few countries such as Spain did offer their immediate support to agricultural production. I should like to pay tribute to those countries.

It was only when the destitute and those excluded from the banquets of the rich took to the streets to voice their discontent and despair that the first reactions in support of food aid began to emerge.

*Mr President,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The causes and consequences of the present crisis have been explained at length so I shall not return to them.

What is important today is to realize that the time for talking is long past. Now is the time for action.

The UN Secretary-General has set up and chairs the Task Force of the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions and other international organizations to bring a coordinated

response to the food crisis. He saw fit to appoint the Director-General of FAO as Vice-Chair of that Task Force. I should like to take this solemn opportunity to thank him profoundly for that expression of confidence.

The Comprehensive Framework for Action prepared by the Task Force provides guidelines on the needs that will be specified, country by country, with the assistance of the local representatives of FAO, WFP, IFAD and the World Bank, in cooperation with the governments. In this connection, on 29 April in Berne, the Secretary-General of the United Nations presented to the press the communiqué approved by the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) for coordination on the immediate needs to deal with the food crisis. We must therefore mobilize the necessary resources now.

Of course, there was a pressing need, despite escalating prices, to maintain the volume of food aid for 88 million people. We must thank those countries that contributed so generously to meet the required 755 million dollars in this regard.

But there are 862 million people in the world who do not have adequate access to food. They need to enhance their living conditions in dignity, working with the means of their generation. They need high-yield seeds, fertilizer, animal feed and other modern inputs. They cannot continue to toil as in the Middle Ages under conditions of uncertainty and exposure to the whims of the weather. Investments are therefore needed: in rural infrastructure, especially for water control with irrigation and drainage, considering for example that 96% of arable land in sub-Saharan Africa depends on rainfall. They need storage facilities to avoid harvest losses that can amount to 40 to 60% for certain crops. Rural roads are essential to bring in modern factors of production and enable harvests to reach domestic and regional markets at competitive prices.

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The current food crisis goes beyond the traditional humanitarian dimension, which has an eminently ethical foundation. This time it also affects the developed countries. Rising inflation is 40 to 50% the result of higher food prices. In a context of high and accelerated growth of gross domestic product of the emerging countries, we must seek sustainable and viable global solutions that will narrow the gap between global food supply and demand.

If we do not urgently take the courageous decisions that are required in the present circumstances, the restrictive measures taken by producer countries to meet the needs of their populations, the impact of climate change and speculation on futures markets will place the world in a dangerous situation. Whatever the extent of their financial reserves, some countries might not find food to buy.

The structural solution to the problem of food security in the world lies in increasing production and productivity in the low-income food-deficit countries. That calls for innovative and imaginative solutions, besides official development assistance. Partnership agreements are needed between countries that have financial resources, management capabilities and technologies and countries that have land, water and human resources. Only in this way will it be possible to assure balanced international relationships for sustainable agricultural development.

The challenges of climate change, bioenergy, transboundary animal and plant diseases and agricultural commodity prices can only be met through frank dialogue based on objective analysis devoid of partisan and short-term interests. In the coming days, the interactive roundtables on these issues and information from the preparatory technical meetings will provide an appropriate framework for dialogue leading to consensus.

Yet, obligation to truth already compels me to note certain facts:

- Nobody understands how a carbon market of 64 billion dollars can be created in the developed countries to offset global warming but that no funds can be found to prevent the annual deforestation of 13 million hectares, especially in the developing countries whose tropical forest ecosystems act as carbon sinks for some 190 giga tonnes.

- Nobody understands how 11 to 12 billion dollars in subsidies in 2006 and protective tariff policies have had the effect of diverting 100 million tonnes of cereals from human consumption, mostly to satisfy a thirst for fuel for vehicles.

- Nobody understands how in a time of globalization of trade, with the notable exception of avian influenza that could lead us to human calamity, there has been no significant investment in the prevention of Newcastle disease, foot-and-mouth disease, Rift Valley Fever, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, the pest of small ruminants, bluetongue disease, African swine fever, tropical bont tick and the New World Screwworm, but also wheat stem rust that since 1999 has spread from Uganda to Iran and could reach India, Pakistan and China, the fruit fly and finally desert locusts, a scourge familiar since the time of the Pharaohs.

- But above all, nobody understands how: first, the OECD countries have created a distortion of world markets with the 372 billion dollars spent in 2006 on supporting their agriculture; next, that in a single country food wastage can amount to 100 billion dollars annually; that the excess consumption by the world's obese costs 20 billion dollars annually, to which must be added indirect costs of 100 billion dollars resulting from premature death and related diseases; and finally that in 2006 the world spent 1 200 billion dollars on the purchase of arms.

Against that backdrop, how can we explain to people of good sense and good faith that it is not possible to find 30 billion dollars a year to enable 862 million hungry people to enjoy the most fundamental of human rights: the right to food, and thus the right to life. It is resources of this order of magnitude that would make it possible definitively to lay to rest the spectre of conflicts over food that are looming on the horizon.

In fact, the problem of food insecurity is a political one. It is a question of priorities in the face of the most fundamental of human needs. And it is the choices made by Governments that determine the allocation of resources.

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I should like to thank most sincerely the Heads of State and Government and the other participants at this conference who have travelled thousands of kilometres so that, together

and in a spirit of solidarity, appropriate solutions to the serious problems of world food security in a multilateral context may be found.

I should like to conclude by expressing my infinite gratitude to the Government and to the people of Italy for the generous hospitality that they have always displayed at these landmark moments in human history.

Thank you for your kind attention.