

Statement by the Independent Chairman of the Council

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High Level Conference on World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy

There can be no doubt that the world is now facing an immediate crisis of food price rises and supply shortages. There can also be no doubt that many of the underlying pressures which are contributing to this situation are with us to stay. Indeed we are glad some of them are with us to stay. We are glad that more and more people can afford a more varied and nutritionally balanced diet. We are glad that there is competition for land, for improved housing and improved leisure. We are glad that some poor people are gaining improved livelihoods from serving these demands. But we cannot be glad that in every society, even the richest, there are losers and that many of the poorest countries are overall worse off and facing a greater challenge in feeding their people.

The Heads of State and Government, both at the World Food Summit in 1996 and in the Millennium Summit in 2000, adopted the goal of halving the number and the proportion of people suffering from hunger by 2015. This goal also clearly links hunger to poverty, calling for a similar reduction in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty. We are still far from achieving these goals. A simple calculation shows that with the existing trend, it will take more than a century to achieve these goals. Indeed, we have come together for this Conference because a combination of factors has made the challenge even greater.

The recent World Development Report by the World Bank shows that agriculture is not only fundamental to food security, but to overall development, especially in developing countries. We are only starting to appreciate the

breadth and depth of likely changes to the environment, to rural landscapes and to agriculture including fish and forests. The degree and impacts of these changes cannot all be predicted, but there is much agreement that they will be profound and have universal effects.

Mr Chairman,

I am not going to repeat the many valuable points made here by heads of state and government and national delegations. I strongly support the declaration developed for this meeting but it is not my intention to state it again. This crisis is immediate, the immediate needs of the hungry and malnourished must be addressed. In the immediate this requires an increase in food aid, with the least distortion possible of market incentives to more production. In the coming two years, we must make sure that there is a production increase, in both the Least Developed Countries and globally and that, the increased production gets to those who most need it. This crisis has many causes, economic, social, climate, demographics, diversification of demand for agricultural products to name but a few. In the medium to long-term we must address the causes. Some of this can happen naturally if we let it, especially through a market response, but the markets alone cannot address the problems of the poorest from livelihoods to safety-nets, the needs for long term infrastructure investments, climate mitigation and adaptation or natural resource management.

The main responsibility lies with national governments. We must mainstream in all our governments' global policies and negotiating positions the cause of the poor and hungry. We need more production, we need cheaper food and we need the means for people to obtain food, the most basic of all rights after the right to life itself. This means that the heads of state and the worldwide delegations here, cannot go home and forget these issues in their trade negotiations, in their negotiations on the climate and other aspects of their environment, in their

negotiations on access to intellectual property, in their budget allocations. All politics are local but we must think long-term local as well as short-term local. We must think comprehensively not slogan by slogan, crisis by crisis. We must think of the family and the village, at the same time as we think globally.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let us take a step back and see if there have been some lessons in the past on which we can capitalize for the future. In the World Food Summit: Five-Years Later in 2002, you came to a conclusion that the basis for successfully addressing the global challenge of food security is the “political will”. A major expression of common political will was the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security in 2004. The adoption of this right-based approach was a major step mobilizing governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and private sector. This calls for a common vision but also calls for concrete action on the part of global community and each country, which unfortunately has not received much attention.

This meeting is about global commitment, but that commitment has to be translated into meaningful action in which the international organizations have a critical role to play. I am addressing you today as Chair of the FAO Council. I also Chair the intensive process which is going on at this moment in FAO for renewal of the Organization to join with the rest of the World Community in tackling these challenges (the Follow-up to the Independent External Evaluation of FAO). How are we in the international community going to move forward?

Among the FAO membership and among its management and staff, there needs to be a reinforced commitment to achieving renewal. But this is not enough,

FAO cannot work in isolation. Most of the basic architecture is in place. FAO provides a global forum and support to countries in policy development, capacity building and technology transfer as well as providing the basic data and analysis, including of trade and even provision of inputs in emergencies. The World Bank provides analysis of the macro-environment. The World Food Programme is meeting food requirements in emergencies and chronic deficits as well as institutionalising safety nets. IFAD assists the poorest of the poor through pro-poor investment. The CGIAR system provides the research which cannot be met by the private sector to adapt to change, including climate change.

The UN Secretary General has convened a food crisis task force of senior officials in the UN system and Bretton Woods Institutions and the Rome based agencies have initiated work on a common strategy, but despite the best efforts of all the international system, your international system is not working as a coherent whole and none of these recent initiatives include the CGIAR International agricultural research institutions.

The main organizations have had recent evaluations. All showed the system was not working as a system. All showed room for improvements in the individual organizations. There was mandate creep with components of the system, despite scarce resources, gradually taking up functions performed by others. There were gaps in the architecture, especially as regards funding and overall analysis and there were failures to pursue possibilities for increased effectiveness especially by joined-up action at country level.

There is no time to lose and no time for grand reforms of the international architecture. The diagnosis at the level of the different components of the system is there from recent evaluations. The overall diagnosis is not. The components of the system must move forward together for the wider good but this will not

happen if this is not a win-win situation for each of the Organizations and countries.

I seize this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Director-General of FAO for the timely call for this Summit and the UN Secretary General's initiative to establish a high-level Task Force to develop a common framework and strategy for coordinated action among key institutional actors on Food Security (CFA).

Mr Chairman,

Since I am not aware of the details of the CFA, I would like to emphasize a few important factors in this regard.

We should set up a tightly time bound review mechanism (six months) building on the existing evaluations, tasked with working with the Governing Bodies and Executive Heads of the Organizations (CGIAR, FAO, IFAD, World Bank, WFP and others), not only to produce actionable recommendations, but to make the system more effective and responsive. A subsequent phase might, if a momentum develops, examine longer-term adjustments and improvements but the concentration should be on immediate steps forward, based on the existing organizational structure, particularly for coordinated funding; identification of priorities and gaps; definition of roles; and sharing of resources where appropriate, backed by an evaluation and monitoring mechanism based on performance, results and accountability.