

NETHERLANDS - Her Excellency Gerda VERBURG

Opening statement, FAO High Level Conference, 4 June, Rome

Mr. Chairperson, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Not a day goes by without the news showing us the serious impact of the growing food crisis. Food riots have broken out in a number of countries around the world. The World Bank has stated that many nations are at risk of social unrest because of rising food prices.

At the same time, Ladies and Gentlemen, not a day goes by without the media drawing attention to the energy and climate issues. Ever rising trends in energy consumption and climate change are a major concern, as they will have a huge impact on our future. Reports show that we use far more of our natural resources than our planet can regenerate. Some reports indicate even four times!

We all have to face these dilemmas, including the dilemma of competing claims for food and fuel.

As a global society, we cannot accept increasing levels of poverty and hunger.

At the same time we need energy security.

Coupled with the urgent need to find effective policies to stop the loss of biodiversity, this means we are faced with one of the toughest challenges of the new millennium.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are no easy answers.

First and foremost we have to respond by substantially investing more in sustainable agriculture again, especially in Africa.

We have neglected agriculture too much in our international policies for sustainable development in the last decade.

In many countries the productivity can and should be considerably improved in a sustainable way.

This should be done by sharing knowledge, developing sustainable production chains, supporting local and regional markets and last but not least by providing more market access for products from developing countries.

We need to develop criteria for sustainable production with relevant stakeholders as well.

Initiatives as the Round Tables on Sustainable Soy and Palm Oil Production deserve our support.

The Netherlands government is committed to improving sustainable agricultural development in developing countries, in particular in Africa, in order to reduce hunger and poverty.

We will invest an additional 50 million Euros for the revitalisation of agriculture in increasing productivity, agricultural knowledge and training, local economies, value-adding chain development and ensuring food security in developing countries.

I call upon other donor countries to increase their investments, in agriculture in developing countries along five specific tracks, as well. Some already do so.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our response to the challenges should be broad.

Governments can and should take a leading role in facilitating and promoting sustainable technological innovations. For example via universities like Wageningen University.

We should respond by investing more in public-private partnerships, in making production chains more sustainable, in setting up public-private trade relations and ensuring that the concept of corporate social responsibility is put into practise.

We should also change our consumption and production pattern in a sustainable way.

Last but not least we have to respond by making the Doha-round a real success, especially in making it a real development round.

If we want to do this, a lot of extra effort from all of us is needed in finding a suitable outcome, which is acceptable to all of us.

Specifically in regard to bio-fuels we should support the use of biomass for energy purposes only if it is produced in a sustainable manner.

For that we need to develop sustainability criteria.

Furthermore we need to invest in developing second generations of bio-fuels in order to avoid competing claims between food, feed and fuel.

At the same time we need all types of renewable energy to combat climate change and enhance energy security, not only bio-energy.

Certainly we don't need new trade restrictions or closing down markets for bio-fuels.

Colleagues,

We have great challenges ahead of us in reaching the Millennium Development Goals and tackling the issue of high food prices.

In this respect the United Nations has a crucial role to play in assisting Member States to meet these goals, but to improve its effectiveness it should 'deliver as one' at the country level.

The Secretary General of the UN has established a Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, which will focus on formulating a response to the increasing food prices.

I would, specifically highlight the role of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the other Rome-based UN agencies.

We need the FAO; it is a crucial organisation in our aim for reaching MDG1 and MDG7.

But we need a fundamentally reformed FAO.

Mr Chairperson, dear colleagues,

To conclude, several roads lead to Rome, and we need to use them all to tackle the challenges of our time, in order to create a future for our children and grand-children.

Let us not forget, we have only one planet to share, and we must ensure its health and sustainability, for our generation and the generations to follow.

Thank you.