

37th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

Rome, Monday 17 October 2011, Opening session (14h30-17h30)

Statement by Prof MS Swaminathan

Chairperson of the Steering Committee of the
High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition

As delivered

Mr Chairman and Members of the Bureau of the Committee on World Food Security
Excellencies,
Director-General of FAO, Dr Jacques Diouf
Madame Michelle Bachelet
Dr Jose Graziano da Silva, D-G elect
UNSG Special representative, Dr David Nabarro
Madam the Executive Director of WFP, Dr Josette Sheeran
President of IFAD, Dr Kanayo Nwanze
Members of the Advisory Group,
Ministers,
Honourable Delegates and Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor for me to address the Committee as the Chair of the Steering Committee of the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, after its first year of activity.

Reports of the HLPE are demand-driven. Last year CFS had requested HLPE to provide it with analytical reports, based on science and knowledge-based analysis, on the following four topics, all in relation to food security:

- Price Volatility and food security
- Land tenure and international investments in agriculture
- Social protection
- Climate change

As agreed when we met with the CFS Bureau in December 2010, we have prepared for this 37th session of the CFS, our reports on the issues of price volatility and on land tenure and international investments in agriculture. We have initiated work on the other two topics, on Social Protection and on Climate Change and the reports will be ready for your consideration next year.

At the outset, I must compliment and thank CFS for choosing these topics of great importance to the eradication of hunger and to the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goal No.1 relating to hunger and poverty by 2015.

In the preparation of our reports, we attached as much importance to the process as to the product. Thus, the HLPE operates with very specific rules, agreed by the CFS, in order to ensure the scientific legitimacy and credibility of the process, as well as its transparency and openness to all sources of knowledge. These two reports have been prepared by two Project Teams appointed by the Steering Committee, and working under its oversight. The process adopted gives opportunities for a diversity of views, suggestions and criticism: the terms of reference, as well as the first drafts (V0) prepared by the Project Teams, have been submitted to open electronic consultations. Final versions of the reports have been reviewed each by three independent eminent experts, on the basis of which the reports were finalized by the Project Teams. These reports were discussed in detail and approved by the HLPE Steering Committee in our meeting in Amsterdam in July 2011. They are now in the hands of the Members of CFS, in all the official languages.

The importance of price volatility in relation to food security is clear from the fact that many international organizations, including FAO, have analyzed this issue in great detail. It is also on the top of the political agenda of the G20 this year. It is the theme of this year's World Food Day. Different causes of price volatility such as demand–supply gap, cost of petroleum products and non-renewable energy, and climate variability, all need to be considered both separately and together. Our report deals with these issues from a global as well as regional and national perspectives. Action at the international level has to be taken by CFS, while national governments should lose no further time in preparing and implementing a comprehensive national food security strategy, wherever this is not in place already.

I would like to summarize briefly the package of measures which we consider to be important:

1. Revisiting international trade rules, in order to promote a “food security oriented” trading system.
2. Creating a better market information system, inclusive on the level of stocks, to help restore confidence in international markets.
3. Tightening up speculation on the futures market to avoid price manipulations.
4. Reviewing support to biofuels, except when there is a win-win situation for both food and energy security.
5. Reducing food waste and post-harvest losses and ensuring food safety.
6. Increasing investment in ever-green agriculture and in agricultural research so as to promote sustainable food production.

7. Giving greater attention to the net income of smallholder farmers, through the concurrent enhancement of farm and non-farm income, and through a small farm management revolution designed to provide them with the power and economy of scale both at the production and post-harvest phases. We should achieve a demographic dividend in agriculture by attracting and retaining youth in farming, through greater attention to the secondary and tertiary sectors of the rural economy.

At the national level, it is important to draw lessons from successful efforts in hunger elimination. Several countries like Brazil, Mexico and India are in the process of making access to food a legal right, in order to insulate the economically underprivileged sections of the society from the adverse impact of price volatility and food inflation. The draft Indian Food Security Bill places emphasis on a human life cycle approach beginning with attention to maternal and child nutrition, particularly during the first thousand days of a child's existence. **It recognizes women as the head of the household from the point of view of legal entitlements to food.** It also gives great importance to the widening of the food basket to include along with rice and wheat, a whole series of nutri-cereals like millets and other underutilized crops. For example, a simple combination of millet and *moringa* (drumstick) will help to provide all the needed macro and micro nutrients.

I have been referring to productivity improvement without associated ecological harm as evergreen revolution. At the national level it is also important to ensure genetic variability among crops and varieties. Anemia in agrobiodiversity will also lead to anemia in human beings.

This is why we, HLPE, argue that the preparation or refinement of **National Food Security Strategies** is important for ensuring food for all and forever, without compromising on human dignity.

In national strategies, integrated attention will have to be given to the **availability of food**, which is a function of food production and, where necessary, imports, to **access to food**, which is a function of purchasing power or jobs, and **absorption of food** in the body which is a function of clean drinking water, environmental hygiene, primary health care, and nutritional literacy.

To safeguard against food inflation, primary attention will have to be given to enhancing small farm productivity and profitability on an environmentally sustainable basis.

National Food Security Strategies should be designed in such a way that all the stakeholders play their part much in the same way as members of a symphony orchestra. Likewise, "Deliver as one" should be the philosophy of all international and

bilateral agencies connected with food security. I do hope that our report on price volatility and food security will help governments to design a hunger elimination strategy which is ecologically, economically, ethically and culturally implementable.

Our report on Land tenure and international investments in agriculture is also a timely one considering the fact that the conservation of prime farm land for agriculture is now occupying a high place in the political and professional agenda. Recent initiatives include the launching of a Global Soil Partnership by FAO and a Global Soil Forum at Potsdam in Germany.

There is growing consensus that investments in agriculture and farm land are more than ever needed. There is also growing concern on the potential adverse effect of “land rush” on food security and poverty alleviation.

Investments in agriculture will be futile if they do not result in decreased hunger and poverty in local communities and countries. Unfortunately, not all investments in agriculture or in land bring benefits to national food security, poverty eradication and environmental improvement. Just 20 percent of investments have actually been followed up with agricultural production on the acquired lands.

Land use and ownership issues are becoming key socio-political problems. An asymmetry of power among the actors involved, including multinational companies, foreign governments, commercial farmers, financial institutions, and local peasants whose land is being acquired, is leading to tensions and in some cases violence .

Here again I would like to summarize briefly the package of recommendations which we consider to be important:

- Build socially inclusive discussion platforms prior to dealmaking, and for post-deal oversight. Too little is known and too little is shared. And this includes domestic land acquisitions, which in some cases account for the bulk of large scale land deals, and is actually deepening a historical problem related to land distribution in many countries.
- Land tenure is key to protect land rights: Governments should create flexible, accessible systems for registering, tracking and protecting land rights, in particular of vulnerable groups, women and local communities, as well as those under “customary rights”.
- Host country governments should play a pivotal role to ensure a proper environment for investments in agriculture, which at the same time provides incentives to invest, safeguards the interests of smallholders, guarantees harmonious rural development, and ensures the long term interests of their citizens, rather than just short term profit for shareholders. **Business models**

should involve small farms and local farmers and generate employment opportunities. **Food security for the nation and livelihood security for the poor should be the bottom line of all land acquisition initiatives.**

- Finally, following the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Land Tenure and other natural resources, **an International Observatory for Land Tenure and the “Right to Food”** needs to be installed to which governments could be invited to report annually on actions taken to align investments in land with food security goals. The Global Soil Partnership of FAO could be a vehicle for spreading knowledge about the voluntary guidelines after their approval.

The World Bank is anticipating a continuation of the land rush. Therefore Governments should develop and implement policies which can ensure that the right to food, as well as the livelihood security of the small land owners are concurrently safeguarded. For this purpose we need institutions and arrangements which better balance the rights and interests of less powerful groups.

For example, the Government of India has introduced in Parliament a comprehensive Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill to ensure a humane, participatory, informed consultative and transparent process for land acquisition. The bill provides for just and fair compensation including adequate provisions for the rehabilitation and resettlement of the affected persons. The proposed international observatory for land tenure can become an effective platform for mutual learning amongst nations.

Excellencies,

I wish to pay my tribute to a very large number of experts who have helped us to prepare, under tremendous time pressure, these two reports. Let me first thank the Vice-Chair Madam Maryam Rahmanian and all my colleagues in the Steering Committee for the hard work done in the guidance and oversight of the studies until their approval by the Steering Committee in July 2011. They have given their time and knowledge free for this work. As per our rules of procedures given by the CFS, the Project Teams are working “under the Steering Committee’s oversight”. Therefore for each report, we had requested a few Steering Committee members to voluntarily devote more time and effort in the oversight of the Project Teams. My special thanks go to Dr Sheryl Hendriks, who convened the Steering Committee’s oversight of the report on Price Volatility and Dr Rudy Rabbinge who did the same for the Land Tenure report. My gratitude goes to the Project Team Leaders Dr Benoit Daviron (Price Volatility) and Dr Camilla Toulmin (Land Tenure) and to the Project Teams members. Our gratitude also goes to the External Reviewers and to the large number of experts who commented both on the terms of reference and the first draft

of the report. Finally let me acknowledge the untiring efforts and excellent work done by the Secretariat of the HLPE, headed by Vincent Gitz.

I am pleased to mention that our work on the preparation of the reports on climate change and on social protection is making good progress. For both those studies, we have already conducted the scoping open electronic consultations. These consultations were extremely successful, confirming the interest that these 2 issues are raising. We will form the Project Teams in the coming weeks and we hope a draft zero of the reports can be produced and submitted for open consultation and expert's views and feedback in March 2012.

In conclusion, let me express my gratitude to the donors who have funded this exercise. HLPE is financed through extra budgetary resources and we are impressed with the spontaneous support the mission and rationale of HLPE has generated.

We strive to keep the HLPE a “low cost, high impact” process. Experts work here for free, as they do in other panels. But there is a need to cover core expenses, like the translation of reports in all official languages. There is also a need to cover for minimal secretariat support, technical support, support to the work of the Project Teams, arrangements of face-to-face meetings that are indispensable to launch and finalize the reports. We hope that pledges can be made here to allow the HLPE to get the support it needs to finalize the ongoing studies, and to fill a current budget gap of about half a million USD to cover these until CFS 2012.

Excellencies,

We are launching the first two reports this afternoon at 17.45 hrs in the Red Room when there will be adequate time for questions and discussion.

The CFS is in its first year of operation after its important reform. This was also the first year of the HLPE. We all agree that the HLPE was not created to be “just one more panel of experts”. We have worked so that our reports are not just “one more report on top of an already very huge pile”. We are proud to have shown that the HLPE can work quickly, efficiently and economically. This is paramount to provide the scientific foundation for the political discourse.

I sincerely hope that our first two reports based on a **demand driven approach** will be of help in insulating national food security systems from price volatility and for ensuring that precious land is conserved for farming for food security as well as for the wellbeing of farm families who constitute 25 per cent of the global population. **Recent unrest in different parts of the world highlights the fact that the future will belong to nations with grains and not guns. In most developing countries, the farm population constitutes the genuine majority of the total population**

and therefore their well-being will determine what the former King of Bhutan has christened as “Gross National Happiness”.

I thank you for your support, guidance and interest.

Prof MS Swaminathan, 17 October 2011