



3 December 2012

145th SESSION OF THE FAO COUNCIL

Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, Mr Luc Guyau,

Distinguished Ministers and Deputy Ministers,

Members of the Council,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to express my sympathies to the family and friends of Dr Edouard Saouma, former Director-General of FAO who has passed away.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you to FAO for this Session of the Council.

This meeting has a special significance for me: just one year ago I shared with you the priorities on which I proposed to focus my work in my mandate.

Today, I will start by offering you an overview of what has been done. I will also address some issues from the agenda of this Session of Council.

I want to start off with how I ended previous speeches to Council: "I will not be able to do anything except what we can do together".



I am pleased to say that, together, we are taking important steps in the directions that we all want.

One fundamental reason for our success together is that we are trying to overcome the legacy of mistrust that existed in the past. We are building trust and respect based on the understanding that we have a common goal and complementary and distinct responsibilities.

At this session, you will consider transformational changes in the 2012-2013 biennium. We are implementing changes already approved by Council in June.

You will also be presented with further initiatives for institutional strengthening that have already been reviewed and supported by the Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committees.

I would like to reassure you that while we are implementing significant transformational changes, we are ensuring the full delivery of the approved Programme of Work and Budget.

In line with established practice, in April 2013 you will receive the Mid Term Review outlining progress of delivery of the PWB.

In the meantime, based on interim data, I am pleased to inform you that that delivery in 2012 is on course and budgetary spending is on target.



Ladies and gentlemen,

In our efforts to build together a new FAO, we need to know that not only we are giving our best effort but that our programmes are also delivering the expected results. Internal programme evaluation is an important part of this.

In this context, I have launched a review that will propose how to strengthen our internal evaluation capacity, will help us better understand how to improve the evaluation function of FAO and address the overlaps between different oversight offices.

I want to be as clear as possible when discussing evaluation to avoid any misunderstanding: I do not question the dual reporting line to governing bodies and Management or the existing functional independence of the Office of External Evaluation. If an evaluation is not independent, it has no value for me.

However, this office, like all others, needs to work within the rules and administrative regulations of FAO with regard to the payment of honoraria or travel arrangements, for example.

Let me add that the vacancy for Director of OED was already announced on 26 November.

Ladies and gentlemen

During this Council session you will discuss the Reviewed Strategic Framework and outline of the Medium Term Plan 2014-17 that are built around the five proposed strategic objectives.



Your endorsement of these objectives will enable me to prepare the next MTP and PWB that will focus our resources in a strategic and goal oriented manner in the next biennium, and will change fundamentally the way we work. In 2013 we will already start piloting cross-cutting approach to work by using savings reallocated to the Multidisciplinary Fund under the leadership of the Strategic Objective team leaders.

I realize that at this stage you will not discuss the budget level for the next PWB. But I would like to reiterate what I said at the last Joint Meeting: the budget level for the next PWB must enable us to achieve our common objectives.

You have welcomed the fact that I found over 26 million dollars in savings and efficiencies this year. And the Council in June approved my proposal to reallocate over 19 million dollars in savings from administrative areas to technical areas.

I thank you for recognizing that I am serious about continuously pursuing more efficiency and best value for money at FAO. These are values I share and that the new FAO is committed to. They are not values that belong to one country alone, but to all of us.

Even a small, real increase in the next budget level will help ensure that the new cross-cutting Strategic Objectives may be achieved, in addition to acting as a catalyst for mobilizing further extra-budgetary resources.

And just like I have done in this biennium, I can assure all of you that I will not use any such increase in resources on administrative areas and neither as additional Human Resources processing.



Let me take this opportunity to raise a proposal to be considered in the next meeting of the Finance Committee: freeze the actual total staff resources in the next biennium.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to recall that I took up office with a senior management entirely set up by the previous administration. This made it more difficult to start moving FAO in the necessary direction of change. Now we are back on track.

You will also recall the concern I voiced to you last December on the lack of clear procedures to assure a formal and smooth transition between Directors-General.

At my request, the Committee on Constitution and Legal Matters and the Finance Committee have addressed this issue.

I trust this Council will endorse the proposed amendments to the General Rules of the Organization and related budgetary arrangements to ensure that incoming Directors-General are not faced with the same situation that I had when I took up office.

I want to stress that I am voluntarily pursuing a course that would in effect mean giving up part of my own powers to introduce the concept of an orderly transition in FAO. This is something that, up to now, has been absent from the Organization.



Ladies and gentlemen,

At the recent Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committees, Members discussed draft Strategies for Partnerships with Civil Society and with the Private Sector.

I want to thank for the support expressed to these strategies.

We will be revising the draft strategy for partnerships with the private sector to ensure, among other things, that FAO's independence and neutrality are safeguarded. We will come back to you at the next Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committees.

With regards to the draft strategy for civil society, we have been able to incorporate your comments after intensive informal consultations with members, individually, in regional groups and at the Informal Seminar with Permanent Representatives.

I am confident that we have addressed all the issues raised and consider that the revised FAO Strategy for Partnerships for Civil Society is ready to be examined by Council.

I want to thank all of you for the time and attention you have dedicated to this matter and that has made this possible. I know that this has been difficult for some of you and I truly appreciate your efforts and support.

The revised strategy for civil society will be presented to you under Agenda Item 9. I ask you to endorse it.



Why the rush, you might ask me? I will give you my reasons.

First, strengthening partnerships in general and with civil society in particular is a central element of the vision for FAO that I presented to you.

Second, your endorsement will send a strong signal that we are truly committed to opening up FAO to meaningful partnerships. After nearly one year in office, I have started to receive comments questioning this intention. If we do not deliver, we risk public political criticism. I do not want to expose the Organization or members to this.

Third, transparency: this strategy gives us a solid and transparent foundation to support the collaboration that already exists and build new ones.

Fourth, our decentralized offices need clear guidance on how to engage with civil society organizations as soon as possible.

And, fifth: it's also a question of time. I do not have 18 years ahead of me. And after almost one year in office I cannot ask our civil society partners to wait four more months and at the same time push them on the Committee on World Food Security led negotiations on the Principles for Responsible investments on Agriculture, that we need to agree on.

I want to stress that in no way is this an attempt to bypass the recommendations of the Joint Meeting. On the contrary: not only did we take your guidance seriously, we immediately started addressing your concerns.



I have explained this personally to the Chairpersons of the Programme Committee and the Finance Committee. I would like to publicly express my gratitude for their understanding.

The procedure that we are adopting in this case – and that has been occasionally followed in the past in particular circumstances – will not set any precedent for the future.

Finally, I would invite you to consider the draft FAO Strategy for partnerships with Civil Society as a living document that can and should be reviewed in future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

FAO needs to adapt to face the multidimensional challenges of today.

We are now starting to move from a project approach to a approach.

We are breaking down institutional silos and promoting synergies across the Organization.

We are breaking down the separation between FAO's work on knowledge and operations.



We are doing away with the artificial separation between emergency, rehabilitation and development.

And we are opening FAO to work better with partners.

For example, in November the African Union Commission and FAO, with the support of Instituto Lula, announced they were joining forces to end hunger in Africa.

For FAO, this partnership embodies the spirit of the changes we are making in the organization. And it reflects the commitment I made last December to improve the Organization's support to national efforts to promote food security.

It is about supporting national governments to find and implement their own paths towards food security and not imposing readymade solutions.

It is about scaling up successful programmes, linking different actions and working with partners to achieve better results.

It is about FAO working as one: breaking the divide between emergency and development; technical knowledge and operations; headquarters and field.

I hope that FAO can truly become a knowledge organization with its feet on the ground.



Ladies and gentlemen,

I am confident that FAO is moving in the needed direction.

The changes we are making are not easy, but they are absolutely necessary.

I urge us to, together, keep on working to transform FAO in the Organization that really contributes to reach the goal of a sustainable hunger-free world. I am confident we will get there.

Thank you for your attention.