

Mr Franz FISCHLER (CANDIDATE TO THE POSITION OF DIRECTOR-GENERAL, FAO)

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you very much indeed for organizing this hearing. In my presentation I would like to deal with four issues.

First, FAO's role in policy-making. Second, FAO's role as a service organization. Third, the reform. Fourth, the most obvious question, why I am seeking your support.

I fully share FAO's vision and wholeheartedly support the three global goals you have identified. Yes, we must eradicate hunger and achieve food security. Yes, we need to eliminate poverty by advancing economic and social progress and enhancing rural development and yes, we are responsible for the sustainable management of our natural resources. But these goals can only be achieved if they are put at the top of the political agenda, nationally and internationally.

At a time when one billion people are suffering from hunger and malnutrition and when food prices are becoming more and more volatile, FAO's leadership is called for. FAO must and can contribute significantly to policy development and must and can be a crucial player in the political decision-making process.

This Organization has the greatest experience and knowledge on how to achieve food security. Therefore it is my ambition to put FAO back at the heart of the international agenda, combating food insecurity. I think that FAO is also best suited to develop policies on how to deal with water scarcity. It has the necessary expertise to mitigate and to adapt to climate change, it must develop a policy to reduce food price volatility.

FAO possesses the best know-how to strengthen land policies, to come forward with concepts for small farmers and rural development, as it can contribute to better forestry and fishery policies and to setting international standards. This is not to forget FAO's tremendous experience regarding the challenges of those people most in need. It is the competent provider of programmes to help to overcome the enormous difficulties faced by the hundreds of millions of subsistence farmers in the world.

It is more and more obvious that fighting for food security, combating climate change or succeeding in getting a more sustainable and fairer usage of natural resources will increasingly determine our global security.

The key issue of the 21st Century is no longer how much more money should be invested in weapons of destruction, but in tools of development. Recent events in different parts of the world have confirmed in a dramatic way that a radical rethink of our security policy is unavoidable.

The more FAO can become part of the international governance structures, the higher its prestige will be. I have the clear ambition to be a fair partner, first and foremost for you, the

members. I would also seek to establish the closest possible relations with the other organizations of the UN family. I am myself the chairman of various civil society organizations and know how to cooperate with them. I have long standing close links to the WTO, the OECD and the World Bank and can use this experience to strengthen the relationships with them and I am keen to cooperate as intensively as possible with the other Rome-based organizations.

Furthermore, I am convinced that it should be possible to make a change in financing agricultural development. We cannot accept that the share of agricultural development spending is less than five percent of the total development cooperation funding.

I see the personal role of the future Director-General as being a kind of ambassador for food security and the representative of the people in need.

My second point is FAO's role as a service organization. We all know about FAO's expertise and the know-how. We also know that in the future R&D will be even more important to enhance knowledge-based agriculture. FAO's experts are not only appreciated all over the world, they are our prized possession. The difference to other treasured items is that the value of FAO grows the more they are used and spread all over the world. Therefore, I think we should put more emphasis on knowledge transfer and on research cooperation.

FAO must act as a link between the scientists and the users, between the experts and the people in need, between those working in the field and those working at headquarters.

On the basis of national programmes, stakeholders, developers and extension services must pull in the same direction. There must be a highly efficient chain of cooperation where the countries in need occupy centre stage. The information must flow between the experts and the people in need, in both directions. This would then make a difference.

This, in my view, is the way how we can deliver more value for money and this is the way in which we can get involved with the most vulnerable – peasants, women farmers, landless people, fishermen and elderly countrymen and women.

This brings me to my third point, the FAO reform. The key issue here in the coming two years is the full implementation of the reform and I would commit myself to do my best to achieve this goal. In my view, reform is not a purpose in itself, but it makes FAO more visible, more transparent, more accountable and also more responsible.

I am used to being a team player and I am sure that if the future management works as a team this approach can become a role model for other parts of the Organization. Such a concept also means that we have to share the responsibility with the directors, with the desk officers and with all the people working for FAO. That we have to implement modern and simple reporting systems. That we must base recruitment and promotion on transparency and merit, while improving gender and geographical balance. This is not to forget the need of sound financial management, using the most modern internal control systems and also financial engineering.

One other point will be very decisive in the future functioning of FAO. On one hand, there is the necessity to bring our know-how to the field and to be as close as possible to where the problems are. This calls for decentralization and deconcentration. On the other hand, it is not less important that FAO functions as one. Both can be achieved if we invest in a closely integrated network structure and at the same time make sure that our personnel working in the regional offices and in the field become change managers and bring different interests together.

Overall, FAO is expected to deliver results. The speedy implementation of the reform has to go hand in hand with the delivery of measurable impacts. This is an absolute must for me, because the results we can show to the world are the basis for our future prestige and this is important.

I am fully committed and dedicated to work as closely as possible with you, the members, because I believe that together we are able to tackle the challenges ahead of us. This is my understanding of leadership in partnership.

Achieving tangible results would be at the heart of my work and coming from a small country, Austria, with a strong tradition of fairness and social balance, I know how to work as an honest broker between the different interests and countries, large and small, rich and poor.

My last point is my answer to your obvious question: why should you vote for me? From the many contacts I have had so far, I know that you are looking for somebody who combines political experience with competence and proven managerial and communication skills. You seek a humble but forward looking person who is able to drive this Organization towards a promising future.

I would like to tell you that I was a policy maker for six years at the federal level and then for ten years in the international arena. I worked for another ten years in the extension service and I had the opportunity to prove my managerial and communications skills when I took a leading part in the administrative reform of the institution I belonged to.

I am an agronomist by profession and in my chest beats a farmer's heart. With this personal and professional experience, my whole life has been dedicated to improving the living conditions and the wealth of all those living in rural areas, in both developing countries and OECD countries. It was on my initiative that farmers in Europe got back their freedom to farm. I removed a lot of agricultural trade barriers and abolished trade distorting subsidies. Together with the implementation of the "everything but arms" concept and various trade agreements, we made a real change. In the meantime, Europe has become the biggest importer of agricultural products from developing countries.

I also had the opportunity to prove my capability to successfully take part in international negotiations. My record demonstrates that I am equipped with the necessary tools for leading and managing FAO, but at the end you will, of course, decide whether you believe that my background, my competence, my political experience, my management skills and, last but not least, my motivation, are good enough to make the necessary difference.

I can assure you that with a common, consensual and result-oriented approach we can provide, not only for the present generation, but also for our children, a life in dignity, free from hunger and poverty and a sustainable world. This is the goal I would like to give my best.

Thank you for your attention and please feel free to put forward any questions you like.

I