



Statement by

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On Agenda Item 117 (b)

Human Rights questions

**Right to Food: Intergovernmental Working Group on Right to Food
Guidelines (IGWG-RTFG)**

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1. As Member States will recall, Heads of State and Government at the World Food Summit: five years later, held in Rome in June 2002, reaffirmed “the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food” and invited “. . .the FAO Council to establish. . .an Intergovernmental Working Group, with the participation of stakeholders, in the context of the World Food Summit follow-up, to elaborate, in a period of two years, a set of voluntary guidelines to support Member States’ efforts to achieve the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security..

2. Accordingly, the FAO Council formally established the Intergovernmental Working Group — IGWG — during its 123rd Session in November 2002. The first Session of the IGWG was convened in Rome on 24-26 March 2003 and was attended by delegates from 87 Members of FAO and the United Nations, observers from over twenty other organizations, and by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. At this First Session, the IGWG held a general debate on the various submissions, opinions and views submitted by States and stakeholders. The general debate was conducted in an innovative way that enabled both State and non-state participants to contribute equally to a constructive exchange of views. The IGWG entrusted its Bureau with the task of preparing a first draft of Voluntary Guidelines in time for its Second Session and extended the deadline for States and stakeholders to submit their views and proposals on the structure and content of the Voluntary Guidelines until 7 April 2003.

3. The Bureau of the IGWG prepared a draft which was discussed at the Second Session of the IGWG from 27 to 29 October 2003. At that Session the IGWG Members and stakeholders discussed the draft Voluntary Guidelines, and decided it should form the basis of negotiations. The IGWG discussed the legal implications of the Guidelines, its structure and purpose, as well as individual draft guidelines. It established a mechanism for inter-sessional negotiations, a working group with spokespersons from each region as well as from NGOs and intergovernmental organizations, which will meet for four days in February 2004. The third session of the IGWG will then conclude the negotiations and submit the draft Voluntary

Guidelines for approval to the September 2004 session of the Committee on World Food Security.

4. Mr Chairperson, FAO remains optimistic that the negotiations will be concluded within the allotted timeframe. However, there are still a number of challenges that must be overcome. These relate in the first instance to the legal status of the right to food, which not all FAO and UN members recognize as a legally binding norm. A second difficulty arises from the wording of the mandate of the IGWG, to focus on “the context of national food security”. As the FAO’s Assistant Director-General stressed in his opening remarks, in the modern, globalized world no country is an island and policies in one country may affect the enjoyment of the right to adequate food in another. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also explicitly refers to the importance of international cooperation. It is therefore difficult not to address the international dimensions of the right to adequate food in the guidelines, while the competence of other forums must also be kept in mind.

5. FAO sees the Voluntary Guidelines as a practical tool to refer to in its own work, when advising FAO Members on policies and when operating projects. In particular, we are anxious to have an instrument that helps those of our Members who are interested in adopting a rights based approach to food security and nutrition and in adapting their own policies and legislation to that effect. FAO recognizes that the human right to adequate food is a complex issue, and that even without fundamental disagreements among States, it would still be far from simple to agree on guidelines that are relevant and applicable to developed and developing countries alike.

6. FAO has established an Ad Hoc Unit for the IGWG-RTFGs the Office of the Assistant Director-General, Economic and Social Department, in close cooperation with the Legal Office. In order to service the IGWG, the FAO Secretariat has established a close working relationship with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and has also involved the Rome based agencies, WFP and IFAD in this regard.

7. The work of the IGWG is mostly funded by extra budgetary resources. Germany is to date the largest donor, but Norway, Switzerland and Italy have also contributed funds. The Ad Hoc Unit is preparing a number of information papers and case studies to help with the process of formulating the Voluntary Guidelines. It has also embarked on a small number of technical assistance projects which aim at strengthening capacity to implement and monitor the right to adequate food at the national levels, as well as to draw lessons from such experiences.

8. In closing, Mr. Chairperson, I wish to bring to the attention of Member States the International Alliance Against Hunger (IAAH), which was launched during the 23 observance of World Food Day here at the United Nations, 17 October 2003. Indeed the IAAH is the title of the final Declaration of the WFS: In that Declaration world leaders recognized that governments alone cannot resolve the problem of hunger. The Alliance represents a new resolve — a partnership amongst governments, food producers and consumers, community organizations, scientists, academics, religious groups, NGOs and all of society to work together at all levels to reduce poverty and to guarantee the world’s citizens a basic human right — freedom from hunger.

9. I thank you Mr. Chairperson