



CEREMONY
on the occasion of
World Food Day

Address by the Director-General

Jacques Diouf

FAO Plenary Hall
Rome, 16 October 2007

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at the World Food Day Ceremony
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The Right to Food: Make it Happen

Plenary Hall, FAO Headquarters, Rome, 16 October 2007

*Mr Horst Köhler, President of the Federal Republic of Germany,
Mr Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of
Tanzania,
Mr Paolo De Castro, Minister for Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policy
of the Italian Republic,
Monsignor Renato Volante, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to FAO,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We have chosen *The Right to Food* as the theme for this year's World Food Day because we want a more equitable world.

Our planet produces enough food to feed its entire population. Yet, tonight, 854 million women, men and children will be going to sleep on an empty stomach.

We must place the human being at the centre of our attention, our policies and our actions.

The right to food is formally recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which the United Nations adopted in 1948.

Since then, this commitment has been gradually strengthened. In 1996, at the World Food Summit, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed the right to food and pledged "to give particular attention to implementation and full and progressive realization of this right as a means of achieving food security for all".

At the international level, in 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognized the right to adequate food and "the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger". The covenant came into force in 1976 and is legally binding on the 156 countries that have ratified it.

The covenant's signatory states undertook to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food. *Respect* by refraining from taking measures that might deprive individuals of their right to food, for example confiscating land or deviating watercourses used for agriculture, without justification and without adequate compensation. *Protect* by ensuring individuals are not deprived of their access to food by third parties; for example, ensuring that permits for industrial activities, such as forestry operations, do not impede access to food or livelihoods. *Fulfil* by facilitating actions and pursuing policies that will contribute to the gradual realization of the right to food. And all those individuals who, for reasons beyond their control,

are unable to meet their needs, must be provided with food or the means to procure food.

In 1999, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which is responsible for monitoring implementation of the covenant, defined the content of the right to food. The right to food exists "when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement". It is thus the right of access to the resources needed to feed oneself. It is not, however, the right to food doleouts. Each individual is responsible for his or her own needs. Only when individuals are wholly incapable of meeting their needs do food aid and other safety nets come into play.

The right to food features in other international treaties and instruments, notably in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It was to promote the realization of these international commitments that, in 2004, the FAO Council adopted the *Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security*.

These guidelines contain policy recommendations in some twenty fields aimed at realizing the right to food. The recommended approach targets both access to productive resources and assistance to individuals unable to meet their needs.

The guidelines represent a step forward in the integration of human rights in the work of food and agriculture bodies, such as FAO, thus reflecting the UN Secretary-General's appeal for reform of the United Nations. They provide an additional instrument to fight hunger and poverty and to hasten achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Promoting the right to food could bridge the gap between the unacceptable reality of hunger and our aspiration to a world without hunger.

Even countries that have no economic growth can promote the right to food by removing those obstacles that stand in the way of the most vulnerable. There is no public cost to eliminating the discrimination, marginalization and exclusion that lead to untold violations of the right to food.

But there is an incalculable cost to neglecting the right to food. What is the life-long impact of a child's nutrition deficiency? How many repeated school years, how many visits to doctors and hospitals, how many lost opportunities for gainful employment as an adult? These questions are rarely asked, yet hunger has a huge cost to health, education and employment systems.

A right is not a right if it cannot be claimed. The existence and proper functioning of recourse mechanisms are essential for the realization of the right to food. A small number of legal actions and judicial decisions have helped to develop this right and reinforce government action.

The right to food is an ally in the campaign for food security as it formalizes and strengthens the principles of human rights, including participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, dignity and the rule of law. It calls for a shift in perception from charity to legal right, and it focuses on the technical aspects of ensuring sustainable and equitable processes.

For many countries, applying the right to food remains a major challenge. Yet, such action is possible in the long term. We need to identify the populations that are hungry, to develop strategies and regulations for food security, to allocate roles and responsibilities, to put in place a legislative framework and to provide mechanisms for seeking redress.

National commitments to implementation of the right to food would have been unthinkable only ten years ago, yet such commitments are already bearing modest fruit. In Brazil, for example, this right is now firmly entrenched and hunger is in retreat.

While the right to food is the responsibility of each country, globalization emphasizes the international dimension of the action to be taken.

In this connection, we need to pay tribute to the influential work of Mr Jean Ziegler, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, whose studies and reports engendered many national processes for the realization of this human right. The creation of the Human Rights Council and the strengthening of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human

Rights, decided by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, are important landmarks for the right to food.

To cite the celebrated Brazilian doctor and anti-hunger activist, Josué de Castro, "Hunger means exclusion; exclusion from land, from income, from work, from salary, from life and from citizenship." He went on to explain, "When an individual reaches the point of having nothing left to eat, that individual is denied everything else. It is a modern form of exile. It is death in life".

There is only one answer to such desperate deprivation: the right to food.

Ensuring each human being has an adequate and regular supply of food is not just a moral imperative and sound economic investment; it is the realization of a basic, universal and inalienable human right.

The world has the means to fulfil the right to food. Now is the time to make it happen.

Thank you.