

Excellencies

Since 2007 the world has been severely hit by a rapid succession of 3 major crises, food, energy and finance, the effects of which are marked particularly for the most vulnerable among us. Even before the financial and economic crisis, the fight against hunger had already met strong setbacks in 2007 and 2008 due to food price shocks and today the number of malnourished has risen to 960 millions.

Beyond the pressing necessity to deal with the emergency situation they create, these crises should be seen as a wake up call for all which compel us to join hands and solve some of our major problems and reach commonly agree goals. Some of these goals deal with the need to guarantee access for all to food, safe water and basic energy services from finite land and water resources. These are indispensable for all aspects of human development: health, livelihoods, and social cohesion but they have to be accessed with the integrity of our terrestrial environmental systems in mind.

These crises are also a wake up call for us to anticipate the acceleration of global changes if we want to prevent future and more severe shocks. We know that the world is facing rapid and unprecedented global changes, including population growth, migration, urbanization, climate change, desertification, drought, land degradation and major shifts in dietary preferences. Agriculture's mission today is therefore two fold. It has to close the gap between supply and demand, both in the short and in the long term, but it also has to work to prevent shocks, increase resilience of the most vulnerable and mitigate environmental impacts. Agriculture cannot do this in isolation, and a new agriculture deal is necessary, that acknowledges the fundamental role of this sector for human development, strengthening the global governance of world food security.

No need to say, there is no agriculture without water. Today, agriculture is the dominant water user and as such has a prime responsibility in meeting human demand for food but also managing the environmental impacts of production: On average human beings need to drink between 2 and 4 litres of fluids a day but consume 2,000 to 5,000 litres through the water used in producing their food. But land and water are limited where favourable climatic conditions for crop production prevail. The future of water therefore lies in large parts in agriculture more responsive to change through investments in improved rainfed agriculture,

modernization of irrigation systems, and enhancing the capacity of management and user institutions. The future of water is in a more productive agriculture. The millions of farmers around the world who provide us with the food we eat are at the centre of any process of change. They need to be encouraged and guided to produce more with less water. This requires well targeted investment, incentives, and the right policy environment.

Energy is also a major key player of the water sector: hydropower and bio-fuels are on top of the agenda and agriculture is a significant energy consumer: groundwater, pumping, farm mechanization, chemicals, etc. FAO has made important contributions in 2008 towards the recognition of the importance of water for food and energy. Bridging the divides is the central message of the World Water Forum this year, and I believe that a significant step has been taken in that direction recently, through improved synergies among the sectors and overcoming disputes arising from competition. Tackling for the first time water for food and energy as well as multiples uses of water at this Forum are clear signals of that new spirit.

Our common challenge is to satisfy all water needs for a growing population. We believe this can be done with water at hands but this requires much more investment than today.

Excellency, ladies and gentlemen,

Times of crises are also times of opportunities. Today's financial crisis has reminded us of the importance of the real economy. I hope that from this Forum we can send a simple message of cooperation and a call to the financial world saying that "here are concrete investments for water infrastructure and for better management of water resources" that can address fundamental human needs, productive livelihoods and that will serve generations to come.