



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement to the 59th Session of the Commission on Human Rights
Geneva, 17 March-24 April 2003

Item 10: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The Right to Adequate Food

Mr. Chairman,

At the World Food Summit: five years later, which was convened in Rome in June 2002, Heads of State and Government 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...". The establishment of these voluntary guidelines is recognized as an important initiative, as it will generate greater understanding of the right to food and of international human rights obligations.

Accordingly, the FAO Council formally established the Intergovernmental Working Group – IGWG – during its 123rd Session in November 2002. Its first Session was convened in Rome in 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 - to be held during the week of 22 to 26 September 2003 - 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.

The FAO Secretariat established a close working relationship with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in order to service the IGWG, and has also involved the Rome based agencies, WFP and IFAD in this regard. FAO specifically invited representatives of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women to participate in the proceedings, as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

The next steps will consist of further consultations among States and stakeholders through the organisation of inter-sessional events that will allow them to discuss specific issues in order to facilitate future negotiations. At the same time, the FAO Secretariat intends to solicit the assistance of other relevant international agencies so that their experiences and insights may also benefit the process.

Mr. Chairman, it is our hope that the Commission on Human Rights will continue to support the work underway in FAO as an important step towards better implementation and realization of the right to adequate food and a potentially useful tool in achieving the goals of the World Food Summit as well as the Millennium Development Goals.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.