

Director-General's message



Message of the FAO Director-General on the World Food Day/TeleFood 2007 theme "The Right to Food"

As we have often stated, our planet produces enough food to adequately feed its entire population. Yet tonight, 854 million women, men and children will go to sleep on an empty stomach.

"The Right to Food" has been chosen to be the theme of this year's World Food Day so that the voice of the disadvantaged may be heard. The theme reflects the international community's growing awareness of the crucial role of human rights in eradicating hunger and poverty.

Since it was first recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the right to food has been strengthened by further international measures. By ratifying the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 156 States accepted the right to food as a legally binding obligation.

Increasingly, the right to food is being written into national constitutions. It also features in legislative texts, regulations and strategies. Social programmes provide more ways of claiming the right to food, thus making it easier for all citizens to enjoy their rights. In this context, information is a key element. People need to be aware of their rights and of how to claim those rights. Officials need to know their obligations and how to fulfil them. While legal obligations rest with the State, all members of society - individuals, organizations, NGOs and the private sector - have responsibilities with regard to the right to food.

Freedom from hunger is one of the fundamental goals set out in FAO's Constitution. At the 1996 World Food Summit, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed "*the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger*". They also committed to the full implementation and gradual realization of this right in order to ensure food security for all.

It was in the follow-up to this commitment that, in 2004, the FAO Council adopted the *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Food in the Context of National Food Security*.

These guidelines serve to bridge the legal recognition of this right and its effective realization, by providing governments and civil society with a coherent set of policy recommendations.

Despite the progress made, putting the right to food into practice still remains a challenge for countries and development practitioners.

An implementation "framework" based on the Right to Food Guidelines has been drawn up in order to implement the right to food in each country. World Food Day

provides an excellent opportunity for countries to take stock of the steps taken and the results obtained. It is also an occasion for debate and consensus-building on further steps for the gradual realization of the right to food.

The right to food calls for a shift in paradigm from charity to rights. Ensuring that every human being has an adequate and stable supply of food is more than a moral imperative or an investment with potentially huge economic returns: it is the realization of a basic human right. And the world has the means to realize that right.

This promise, conceived in the 20th century should come to fruition in the 21st century. That is why, on this World Food Day of 2007, I invite you to join me in making the right to food a tangible reality for all.