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CONFERENCE

Thirty-third Session

Rome, 19-26 November 2005

STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE THIRTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF FAO

Mr Chairman of the Conference,

Mr Independent Chairman of the Council, Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Organization and I would even say the whole of the United Nations system have been sorely tested during the course of this closing biennium. On the one hand, we have had to meet the demands of emergency assistance and the more long-term threats over food security while, on the other, we have had to face the challenges of a world undergoing rapid change, in which everything is being called into question, including the functioning of our institution.

The challenges posed by the new emergency situations

In the last days of 2004, the world witnessed one of the greatest natural disasters of the past hundred years, the tsunami. This colossal tidal wave claimed the lives of more than 230 000 victims in Asia and on the coastline of East Africa and obliterated the livelihoods of thousands more.

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The donors responded generously to the United Nations appeal. A total of US\$59.4 million was approved for activities led by FAO, with a further US\$18 million pledged. By way of example, US\$1 230 000 worth of agricultural inputs have been distributed to more than 30 000 beneficiaries in Indonesia. In Sri Lanka, 2 800 fishing boats and 2 720 engines have been repaired and US\$3.2 million worth of fishing gear has been supplied. In the coming months, FAO will be concentrating its efforts on an integrated multisectoral programme that focuses on the rehabilitation of livelihoods of coastal populations dependent on agriculture and fisheries.

Before the devastation of the tsunami, the Caribbean region had been hit by the worst hurricane of the last ten years, causing damage to infrastructure and destroying factors of production. FAO mobilized more than US\$7 million to help the affected countries, including US\$2.4 million from its own resources. This year FAO has also provided assistance to five countries affected by the passage of Hurricanes Emily, Dennis and Stan, distributing agricultural inputs to the most affected families.

More recently, the earthquake that hit northern Pakistan caused the loss of more than 70 000 lives, thousands injured and 3 million homeless, destroying entire towns and villages and livelihoods. Agricultural losses have been put at US\$440 million. FAO has launched an appeal for US\$25 million to help farmers resume their activities and has already provided US\$440 000 from its own funds.

In Africa, several regions have again been affected by drought and poor harvests. FAO has stepped up its intra- and post-conflict rehabilitation activities in Africa and the Near East, including the Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Iraq. Its work has also focused on mitigating the effects of HIV/AIDS in southern Africa, through such means as farmer field schools for young orphans.

The year 2004 was also marked by a resurgence in locust activity in North and West Africa which, despite FAO's early warnings in October 2003, had severe repercussions on the harvests of some countries. However, thanks to stronger mobilization during the summer of 2004 and donor support, FAO was able to help 18 countries affected by desert locust invasion to implement control campaigns. This resulted in the treatment of 13 million hectares. Some 600 experts participated in a training programme on locust control. Altogether, since the beginning of the locust crisis, US\$74.8 million have been mobilized, including US\$6.3 million from FAO's own funds.

Since February 2004, FAO has been at the forefront of efforts to halt the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza. In Asia, over 140 million poultry have died or been culled and economic losses in the poultry sector alone are estimated to amount to over US\$10 billion. Other outbreaks have now occurred in Central Asia, Europe and the Near East.

FAO and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) consider that the most effective way of preventing a pandemic is to control outbreaks of bird flu at source in the poultry farms and to carry out prevention actions. In follow-up to the recent meeting held in Geneva at WHO headquarters, a three-year comprehensive programme costing an estimated US\$500 million is being prepared to implement measures to halt the spread of the disease and prevent the virus mutating and adapting to people.

In December 2004 an Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Disease Operations (ECTAD) was set up to bolster the Organization's action in this area. ECTAD is headed by FAO's Chief Veterinary Officer and implements the guidelines of the Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases (EMPRES).

Main activities during the 2004-05 biennium

On a more positive note, the year 2010 will, I hope, be the year when FAO and the international community are able to announce the eradication of rinderpest, which has decimated cattle and wildlife in Europe and Africa. After fifty years of intense effort, it seems that only a single pocket of rinderpest continues to exist in the Horn of Africa. But we cannot relax until this fast-spreading disease is completely eradicated.

In addition to the steady increase in its emergency activities, special attention has been paid this year to FAO's role as a knowledge organization in the areas of its mandate. A study was conducted out to determine the best way of strengthening this role and its conclusions have been taken up in my proposals for reform of the Organization. The idea is to make rational use of the accumulated knowledge of experts and technicians in each department, in the decentralized offices and in the academic institutions and research centres of the Member Nations, by compiling and processing the information so that it can be easily accessed. That is why all FAO units have begun in recent months to determine, exhaustively and in order of priority, FAO's in-house expertise and that of its partners.

Thanks to better coordination of the production and dissemination of information through the World Agricultural Information Centre (WAICENT), access to FAO's statistics and technical data has significantly improved in the last two years. FAO's website, which now posts an average 85 million hits each month with 16 million pages downloaded, is one of the largest integrated databases in the world. It will soon become an instrument of exchange on best agricultural practices.

Recognizing the potential of digital technology to overcome the barriers to information and knowledge that face rural populations, FAO launched a strategic programme in 2004 to bridge the rural digital divide.

It is important in this regard to continue mainstreaming communication for development in FAO's programmes. In collaboration with the World Bank, the Organization will host the first World Congress on Communication for Development in October 2006, which will examine how to improve the access of rural populations to information and new technologies.

In terms of investment knowledge support, FAO's Investment Centre has helped launch two new initiatives during the biennium: the *Global Donor Platform for Rural Development*, which serves as a communication tool for promoting donor awareness of the Millennium Development Goals; and the EastAgri network of financial institutions for Eastern Europe and Central Asia which aims to strengthen investment in agriculture and agro-industry through knowledge sharing, public and private sector partnerships and policy dialogue.

One of FAO's tasks as a knowledge organization is to manage information globally and to disseminate it locally, for example within the framework of activities linked to EMPRES, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture or the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent.

The EMPRES desert locust programme has recently been extended to West and Northwest Africa, while its "plants" programme now covers a wider range of transboundary plant pests.

Transboundary animal diseases continue to present problems: foot-and-mouth disease in Asia and America, classical swine fever in Central America and the Mekong Delta, African swine fever and contagious bovine pleuropneumonia in many parts of Africa. An important development in this area has been the joint FAO/OIE initiative entitled "Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases" that focuses on the strengthening of veterinary services and national capacity through North-South and South-South partnerships, surveillance, early warning and response systems, and the regional networks to better design intervention measures and improve related knowledge.

FAO has continued to help developing countries to make full use of integrated pest management techniques to improve production and reduce pesticide-related risks to human health and the environment.

FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) remains a unique and constantly updated database on global, regional, national and subnational food security. Innovative methods of collection, analysis, presentation and dissemination of information are being introduced. GIEWS works closely with WFP, the donor agencies and national institutions to refine methodologies for the assessment of food needs.

Following an intensive elaboration process lasting two years and with the active participation of the Members of the Organization and NGOs, a set of "*Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security*" was endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security. These guidelines, which are presented to you in information document C 2005/INF/11, were unanimously approved by the Council in June 2004. The challenge now is to put them into effect. Although these directives are relatively complete, further work will be needed to actually apply them and, especially, to examine their implications for policies, institutions and legislation. With this in mind, FAO has set up a new unit whose capacities have been strengthened thanks to donor support.

The entry into force of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture on 29 June 2004 has renewed global interest in the conservation and sustainable use of these resources. This interest is reflected in the establishment of the Global Crop Diversity Trust which will play a lead role in the conservation of the collections of institutes belonging to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and the developing countries.

At its tenth regular session in November 2004, the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture endorsed a schedule for completion of the final version of the first *Report on the State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources*. This schedule indicates that a first draft of the Report will be submitted to the Commission for review in 2006.

Following the coming into effect of the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, the functions of secretariat to the Convention were entrusted to FAO and UNEP. At the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties in September 2004, 14 new chemicals were added to the prior informed consent procedure. FAO has been working closely through its regional offices to deliver technical assistance to countries on the ratification and application of the Convention. As of September 2005, there were 100 parties to the Convention, representing a 25 percent increase over the previous year.

FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme remains its main vehicle for providing technical assistance to the Member Nations. In 2004, TCP approvals totalled US\$77.6 million and the delivery level stood at US\$70.3 million, the highest level since the TCP was established.

At the request of the Council, the Programme Committee examined the Secretariat's proposals for reinforcing the operational and policy framework of the TCP. These proposals have just been endorsed by the Council. The Programme's strategic objective is now clearly and formally defined: to contribute directly to the attainment of the World Food Summit target and the Millennium Development Goal of halving hunger and poverty by 2015. For this reason, special attention will now be paid to the allocation of TCP resources to the neediest countries, those in which hunger, food insecurity and poverty are greatest.

In keeping with the same objective, FAO's Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) continues to operate, including through regional programmes and with key support from the South-South Cooperation Programme. There are currently 36 South-South Cooperation agreements and 625 experts and technicians are already in the field.

Quality and quantity changes have been introduced into the SPFS in 2004-05 to reflect the recommendations of the Independent External Evaluation in 2002. It is now operational in 105 countries and in the process of being upscaled to national programme level in more than 40 countries. The Programme has mobilized more than US\$770 million, with over half of this amount coming from the national budgets of the developing countries themselves, mostly under unilateral trust fund arrangements with FAO.

At regional level, FAO has helped 20 regional economic integration organizations to formulate food security strategies based on the development of intra- and inter-regional trade, with a special focus on strengthening capacity to observe health and *Codex Alimentarius* standards.

The TeleFood Programme has permitted more than 2 000 small-scale projects in 127 countries, each with an average budget of US\$7 000. I am also delighted to report that donations received during Spain's TeleFood gala evening to mark World Food Day 2005 reached an unprecedented €2 300 000, with over 70 000 people calling the telephone centres to make a contribution.

Despite the budget constraints of this biennium, the Organization has continued to invest in new information technologies and computer applications in the field of finance and human resources, which is essential if decentralization and streamlining are to be successful. Of particular note is the €20 million investment provided by the Italian Government to modernize the library, and I take this opportunity to thank the authorities of our Host Country which has always been very generous to the Organization.

Cooperation with agencies of the United Nations system

FAO has continued to deepen its cooperation with other agencies of the United Nations system. Once again, FAO, IFAD and WFP made joint statements in March and July 2005 to the UN Economic and Social Council in support of the first Millennium Development Goal. In October, WFP and FAO also presented the Economic and Social Council with information on the "Food Crisis in Africa". ECOSOC was also briefed by FAO and WHO on measures taken to deal with bird flu.

Following the independent evaluation of the work of the Inter-Agency Working Group on the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping Systems (FIVIMS) conducted in 2003-04, it was agreed that FIVIMS would continue to play a key role in the fight against food insecurity and poverty. The evaluation also stressed that the agencies associated with the Working Group should raise their level of commitment. The representatives of the donors for their part indicated their desire to support a strengthened inter-agency FIVIMS project, led by FAO.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, which underwent a thorough evaluation in 2002, is now implementing its recommendations to streamline the process of standard setting and to enable it to respond better to country needs and to the ever greater demands of consumers throughout the world. The Codex, as a joint FAO/WHO programme, is a perfect example of interagency collaboration. It is still considered one of the most transparent and participatory of bodies involved in the setting of standards. It represents a truly international forum in which all stakeholders, including civil society, can seek to reach consensus.

In 2003, the Conference had urged us to intensify our assistance to developing countries and countries in transition so that they could participate fully in the negotiations on agriculture taking place under the World Trade Organization (WTO). Among the many initiatives that have been taken to this effect, seven regional workshops were held on technical issues in negotiations relating to the August 2004 WTO Framework Agreement. These workshops were attended by 300 representatives from 120 developing countries.

Finally, among the areas of cooperation in which we have seen real commitment on the part not only of our partners here in Rome but also of many NGOs involved in the fight against hunger and poverty, is the International Alliance Against Hunger and the 22 affiliated national alliances that have already been set up. Similar alliances are in the early stages of development in a further 21 countries, while 50 countries have expressed an interest in such a mechanism. The International Alliance Against Hunger has established a website to provide information on the commitments and progress of each in the fight against hunger.

Activities of the main technical committees

I should now like to turn briefly to the activities of the technical committees that met this year. At its thirty-first session last May, the Committee on World Food Security expressed concern over the slow rate of progress towards halving the number of people suffering from hunger by 2015. At the current pace, this goal will only be achieved in 2150. According to the latest estimates, 852 million people are suffering from undernutrition, including 815 million in the developing countries, 28 million in the countries in transition and 9 million in the industrialized countries.

The work of the sixty-fifth session of the Committee on Commodity Problems and the Consultative Sub-Committee on Surplus Disposal, which looked at issues relating to food aid, came to the forefront of the international agenda in view of the upcoming Sixth WTO Ministerial Meeting this December.

The nineteenth session of the Committee on Agriculture welcomed the proposal for FAO to convene an International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in 2006 and the offer of the Government of Brazil to host this conference next March. It will help to mobilize international efforts to improve the access of the poor to land and support services.

The work of the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Fisheries was influenced by the tsunami tragedy. The Committee highlighted, among other things, the key coordinating role that FAO should play in providing relief. It endorsed the medium- and long-term strategy for the rehabilitation of fishing livelihoods and the reconstruction of aquaculture facilities.

The session of the Committee on Fisheries was followed by a Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries, attended by the ministers of 121 governments or their representatives. They adopted the Rome Declaration on Fisheries and the Tsunami and the Rome Declaration on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.

The seventeenth session of the Committee on Forestry was preceded by the second Ministerial Meeting on Forests which was attended by 45 ministers and 90 heads of forestry services, with a total of 700 participants representing 127 countries and 30 organizations. This meeting recognized the leadership role that FAO should play in future international arrangements on forests, in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, in strengthening the regional forestry commissions and in the realm of prevention and management of forest fires.

The Committee on Forestry for its part recognized that forest fires represent a serious threat to sustainable forest management and invited FAO to collaborate with its partners in elaborating a voluntary code of practice to improve forest fire prevention and response.

The latest assessment of forest resources indicates a net forest loss in the first five years of the new millennium 20 percent down from the previous decade. However, it is also true that deforestation and the conversion of forests to agricultural land are continuing at an alarming rate. Over 25 percent of the world's population rely heavily on forests for their livelihoods, that is 1.6 billion people, including 1.2 billion in the developing countries. Fortunately, the considerable efforts to plant forests and restore landscapes that have been deployed in many countries have significantly reduced these negative trends.

Main activities at regional level

With regard to the Organization's activities at regional level, following the adoption of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme by the African Heads of State and Government gathered in Maputo in June 2003, and the commitments made on that occasion to increase to 10 percent the share of national budgets allocated to agriculture and rural development within five years, FAO is helping to develop a budget tracking system to monitor the progress of countries towards this target. To give tangible effect to the commitments inscribed in the Maputo Declaration, FAO has also helped 51 African countries, at their request, to define national medium-term investment plans and to prepare profiles of bankable investment projects. At present, medium-term plans have been prepared for 30 countries and 123 project profiles have been formulated.

I should like to strongly encourage the African countries to integrate this process into their national development plans with the support of donors and in this way to ensure implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme. Progress in this regard was examined by the African Union Summit held in Syrte in July 2005, at which the African Development Bank and FAO presented a joint report on the first two pillars of the Comprehensive Programme: water control and the development of rural infrastructure.

In the Caribbean, FAO has worked to mobilize investment and has started to help governments to expand their national programmes in order to strengthen the competitiveness of their agricultural sectors and improve their food security. Drawing upon the experience of NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, each country will formulate a national medium-term investment plan for its agricultural sector, in consultation with all stakeholders, and will then define profiles of bankable investment projects.

In Central America, FAO's assistance has focused on improving food security through the implementation of a regional programme for food security, together with national programmes in four countries.

In the South Pacific, FAO has implemented a regional programme for food security, financed with a contribution from the Italian Government of US\$4.5 million, for 14 small island states. This programme aims to improve agricultural productivity, marketing and trade in the region. In the run-up to the Sixth WTO Ministerial Meeting to take place in Hong Kong in December 2005, FAO has stepped up its assistance to Member Nations, in particular to the least advanced countries of Asia and the Pacific, to strengthen their trade negotiating capacity and to improve their competitiveness in production and marketing. FAO is also working closely with the Asian Development Bank to mobilize resources for poverty eradication and the control of animal diseases. It has helped the regional economic integration organizations to define regional programmes for food security.

In the Near East, 11 countries have received support in defining and applying national agricultural development strategies. Several countries have received assistance in establishing national strategies and action plans for their water resources and in formulating projects to improve water management in the agricultural sector. FAO has helped the Sudan to find solutions to the problem of land access in this period of consolidation of the peace process. It has also helped with the evaluation of the food and nutrition situation in Iraq, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Programme of Work and Budget 2006-07 and proposals for reform

One of the main tasks before the Conference is the adoption of the Programme of Work and Budget for the next biennium. My proposals are contained in a two-volume document. The first volume follows the traditional form, without major change to programmes or structures. As requested by the governing bodies, it sets three scenarios: zero real growth, which would maintain purchasing power, a proposal for real growth of about 2.5 percent per year and zero nominal growth, which would in fact represent a real reduction of 5.7 percent.

At its last session, the Conference approved a budget of US\$749.1 million for the 2004-05 biennium, which represented a substantial increase in nominal terms over the previous biennium but did not provide the resources needed to maintain the programme at the same level. We were therefore forced once again to implement programme cuts amounting to US\$51 million and to draw up a revised Programme of Work and Budget for 2004-05. This was approved by the Programme Committee and the Finance Committee in May 2004. Every effort has been made to mitigate the impact of this reduction in resources on the key priority areas of the Members of the Organization, but a significant number of planned outputs have had to be dropped. Regrettably, the exercise also involved the abolition of 232 established posts, including 89 in the professional category and 143 in the general service. This process was managed through the usual arrangements, with the full collaboration of the staff associations and taking advantage of all opportunities for redeployment and the possibility of using a portion of the arrears in contributions.

In the second volume that has been put before you (Supplement to the Programme of Work and Budget), I propose wide-ranging reforms that are aimed at strengthening the Organization so that it can deal with its challenges and better respond to Members' needs. The Programme Committee and the Finance Committee were the first to look at the reform proposals. They asked for additional clarifications which resulted in the release of an Addendum.

The Supplement and the information document *FAO Reform – A vision for the twenty-first century* explain why change was needed at this turning point in the life of the Organization. I have used every opportunity to explain to the representatives of Members and to the staff why FAO must act without delay to strengthen its relevance and its effectiveness.

First, we had to take note of the changes that are taking place in the United Nations system and the strong demands, reiterated at the 2005 World Summit, to advance further in the reform process that has been under way for several years. FAO could not just stand back and watch this process unfold. It also had to take account of the coordination and harmonization measures included in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness that was adopted in March 2005.

It was also essential to refocus its programmes and activities around the priorities identified by the Member Nations, in particular the Millennium Development Goals, beginning with the first of these to reduce hunger and poverty. That was the conclusion of the review in early 2005 of all FAO programmes in the light of the Millennium Development Goals and the ongoing process of UN reform, which was presented at the last session of the Committee on World Food Security in May 2005.

FAO should therefore consolidate its role as adviser to governments and should contribute to coordination processes at the national level, especially the Common Country Assessments and the UN Development Assistance Frameworks, as well as the UN Resident Coordinator system.

It should also strengthen its partnerships with other United Nations agencies, by developing joint programmes along the lines of the *Codex Alimentarius*, the Joint FAO/AIEA Division or the FAO/World Bank Cooperative Programme.

Its working methods should reflect the findings of the in-depth survey on the role of FAO as an organization that gathers, analyses, processes, disseminates, transfers and applies knowledge.

We had to take into account the outcome of a series of studies and evaluations, in particular the Independent Evaluation of FAO's Decentralization which indicated that the decentralization process initiated in 1994 had still not produced the full benefits expected.

Finally, we needed to take into account the different recommendations made by the External Auditor and the Inspector-General to improve effectiveness and reduce costs.

As for the content of the reform, the objective is to refocus FAO's programmes and activities on those areas in which it has a comparative advantage. I should like to mention in this regard:

- cooperation with the United Nations system to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals, beginning with the reduction of hunger and rural poverty. That is the aim of the Special Programme for Food Security at national and regional level, including in particular investment in water control, in infrastructure and in the processing, packaging and marketing of agricultural commodities. Assistance for the post-disaster recovery of production capacity, together with the prevention of disasters and the mitigation of their consequences is also part of this objective;
- the exchange and dissemination of knowledge, by developing thematic knowledge networks and collecting information on best practices;
- activities to promote the agricultural sector and the fight against hunger and poverty, notably through alliances against hunger;
- consumer protection by applying quality and safety standards throughout the food chain.

The reforms should also facilitate and increase inter-disciplinary work on horizontal subjects and programmes, including capacity building, gender equality, natural resources, climate change, sustainable development, research and extension.

The Members' stated priorities are obviously protected and consolidated, with particular attention paid to the control of transboundary plant and animal pests and diseases, and the application of the International Plant Protection Convention, the Rotterdam Convention on pesticides, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, the right to food, *Codex Alimentarius* and the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. The development of aquaculture and the sustainable management and protection of forests and fish stocks are also given prominence.

Another objective of reform is to better align FAO's structures with its major programmes. The departments in Rome will continue to work on the global issues and to collect and process information. Two new departments will serve to carry out horizontal actions, to generate synergies and to encourage multidisciplinary activities. These should strengthen FAO's role in the collection, management and dissemination of information, especially for capacity building at country and regional level. They will also be charged with facilitating partnerships and alliances.

Decentralization will be reinforced to bring FAO's expertise and services closer to the member countries, to where the needs actually arise, in accordance with the recommendations of the Independent Evaluation of FAO's Decentralization. Thus:

- multidisciplinary teams will be put in place at the level of the regional economic integration organizations to provide technical and investment support as well as policy advice;
- FAO Representatives will have greater authority and direct access to operating resources. They will also be more directly involved in assistance activities in close cooperation with United Nations country teams.

The simplification and computerization of procedures, a broader delegation of authority and a reduction in clearance requirements should enable the Organization to be more efficient. Accountability will be strengthened. Training and refresher courses will be organized. The hierarchical structure will be flattened, keeping the same number of assistant directors-general but seriously depleting the number of posts at director level.

As the Member Nations have repeatedly urged, it was also time to rectify the often inherited imbalances that existed in the distribution of Regular Programme funds in order to enhance the operating capacity and flexibility of the Organization. Thus:

- the percentage of total budget resources allocated to staff will be reduced from 66 to 60 percent, with an overall reduction of 122 established posts;
- the number of national professional officers will be increased by 131 posts, to counterbalance a reduction of 85 international professional posts;
- the percentage of professional posts at Headquarters will fall from 70 to 60 percent, with a corresponding increase in decentralized offices;
- the percentage of non-staff human resources in the budget will increase from 17 to 21 percent, which will give the Organization greater room for manoeuvre in recruiting external specialists, as and when required;
- the ratio of general service to professional posts will fall from the current 1.25 to 1.09;
- the share of expenditures not related to human resources will increase from 34 to 40 percent. The funds thus made available for equipment, travel and operations will serve to improve the provision of services.

Staff redeployment resulting from the reduction of posts under the reform will be carried out in consultation with the staff associations. This exercise will be greatly facilitated by the freeze on recruitment that has been in effect since August 2005 and by expected retirements. A total of 57 director posts, 252 professional posts and 211 general service posts will thus be freed.

Conclusions

Many experts view reform as an unavoidable feature of the life of institutions. However, the pace of reform sometimes needs to be accelerated to adjust better to an environment that is undergoing serious change. It is also desirable to follow periods of deep-seated reform with periods of relative stability to maximize anticipated benefits.

I am convinced that the reform proposals that have been submitted for your consideration are essential to the life of the Organization and that they need to be launched without delay and as a whole, as a single coherent package. I also believe that the Independent External Evaluation of FAO that was decided by the Council will complement the reforms that I am proposing. Its analyses will provide a sustainable impact on the medium and long term. That is why I shall be awaiting the findings of the Evaluation with the most open of minds.

I have indicated that these reform proposals could be implemented whatever the level of budget decided. The reforms of 1994-1996 were carried out regardless of this factor despite the budgetary constraints at the time. But delegations will recall that this was not an easy task and that not all the objectives could be met in a timely manner.

Obviously, if the Members endorse these new reforms, the decision this Conference takes on the budget will have an influence on the pace and effectiveness of their implementation. I therefore appeal to your collective wisdom in providing FAO with the resources it needs to meet your expectations in the best possible way and to make a substantial contribution to the objective of reducing hunger and poverty.

In this respect, I should like to remind you that, in accordance with the Rome Declaration of 1996, a special forum will be held next September on the occasion of the thirty-second session of the Committee on World Food Security to examine progress in implementation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action. As you know, progress is far from satisfactory. Each year five million children die from causes related to undernutrition. It is high time we put a stop to this tragedy which also costs developing countries billions of dollars in lost productivity and earnings. FAO can and must help this happen.