

June 2009

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منظمة الأغذية
والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

联合国
粮食及
农业组织

Food
and
Agriculture
Organization
of
the
United
Nations

Organisation
des
Nations
Unies
pour
l'alimentation
et
l'agriculture

Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная
организация
Объединенных
Наций

Organización
de las
Naciones
Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

COUNCIL

Hundred and Thirty-sixth Session

Rome, 15-19 June 2009

Statement of the Director-General

Mr. Independent Chairman of the Council,

Honourable Delegates,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to express my great appreciation for your presence in Rome to participate in the 136th Session of the Council. Your meeting is taking place at a crucial time, when the Organization has just embarked on the implementation of the Immediate Plan of Action and when the world is facing remarkable challenges at the core of FAO's mandate.

(FAO reform)

These conditions have also created opportunities for FAO to address these growing challenges as a reformed organization. Indeed, the IPA is the blueprint for the most comprehensive reform process that any UN organization has undergone to date. We are now in the first months of the implementation of an ambitious three-year plan that you unanimously endorsed at the Special Conference in November 2008. We all knew it would not be easy – yet, we are clearly on the right track.

The implementation of the IPA needs strong leadership and commitment, and close collaboration between staff, management and you, our Members. I am pleased that we have these pre-conditions for success in place.

Members are already aware of, and should have observed through my actions, my commitment to the renewal of FAO. I have personally provided the leadership and given the strategic guidance to ensure swift, efficient and sustainable progress, with the necessary measures for the day-to-day implementation being taken by the Deputy Director-General. To ensure a participative and distributed structure, we have involved many staff, and indeed many leaders – selecting the most qualified individuals for each area of the work of the IPA. Through this sharing of effort at

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headquarters and in decentralized offices, we can be confident of obtaining successful and sustainable results.

On your part, the Conference Committee for IEE Follow-up and its Working Groups have met more frequently than was envisaged by the 2008 Conference. Members continue to participate in large numbers, to engage with management in an unprecedented form of intense dialogue. Rome-based members have also participated in several informal meetings, with management and the staff representative bodies. I wish to sincerely thank you all for your untiring commitment to the IPA implementation.

I am convinced that through our joint and constructive efforts, FAO will emerge from the reform process with better governance structures and improved mutual understanding among the membership, and with the necessary regular budget and extra-budgetary resources to fulfil its mandate adequately.

On management's part, and with your guidance, FAO will continue in its efforts to demonstrably function as one, with its structure, roles and responsibilities aligned to a focussed results-based framework, supported by streamlined administrative and management systems, and a motivated and highly performing work force. I hope that these reforms will constitute a central part of my and your legacy of this Organization.

In these early months of implementation, we are already starting to see some encouraging results of our efforts.

As a noteworthy example of joint work and partnership between the Secretariat and member countries, important changes to the Basic Texts have been discussed to Members' satisfaction in record time.

This session of Council is also witnessing the joint efforts of Management and the Conference Committee and its Working Groups, as well as the Committees of the Council, in preparing the Strategic Framework and combined Medium Term Plan 2010-13 and Programme of Work and Budget 2010-11. These documents will integrate the work of headquarters and the decentralized offices, global and regional priorities, and assessed and voluntary contributions around specific results. While the documentation presented to this session is "work in progress", we can be satisfied with the improvements and innovations made. The first complete draft of these documents will be presented next month.

Another central aspect of the renewal package is in the area of Human Resources. Members have agreed on a Human Resources Management Strategy and Policy Framework, and the Finance Committee last month endorsed the key areas of work, including new human resource policies and Staff Performance Evaluation. Some new policies, such as flexible working arrangements and use of retirees, have already been adopted.

Despite resource constraints, we have made tangible progress in improving the effectiveness of our decentralized structures since 2005. To name just a few areas: stronger alignment with country needs through preparation of National Medium Term Priority Frameworks and better partnership in UN system country level activities; more effective support to country level activities through a revamped sub-regional structure; improved arrangements for dealing with transboundary issues at sub-regional and regional levels; increased delegations of authority; and improvements in administrative and communication systems. Further changes are under execution, including revised reporting lines for country offices, delegation of Technical Cooperation Projects to the regions, a new competency framework for FAO Representatives and an extensive training programme.

The Root and Branch Review recommended by the IEE was finalized less than two months ago. We have agreed with the vast majority of its recommendations and will implement them through the IPA projects. These recommendations are expected to improve the effectiveness of our administrative services and result in 7.8 million US dollars of net savings over the first seven years and 13 million dollars per biennium thereafter.

FAO Renewal is progressing at full speed. In the first six months of the three year plan, 58 percent of the activities are already under implementation and some 4 percent have been completed.

While some three-quarters of IPA actions do not need additional external funding and are being currently implemented, some of the core areas of reform require significant funding. The provisional 2009 costs have been substantially revised down to 15.25 million dollars through careful sequencing, the constant search for more efficient means of delivery and the incorporation of the results of the Root and Branch Review. However, it should be noted with great concern that the IPA Trust Fund only has received pledges for a total of 7.2 million dollars, of which only 4 million in actual contributions.

Taking FAO renewal to completion will require the continuous commitment and hard work of membership, management and staff, and your generous contributions, not only in 2009 but through to the end of 2011. I have no doubt that we will continue to rise to the challenge, building on the spirit developed throughout 2008 of joint work and mutual understanding and give and take.

Mr. Independent Chairman,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(State of food insecurity in the world)

I trust you will agree with me that the current state of world food insecurity is unbearable. The events of the last three years have been particularly tragic. They clearly demonstrated how fragile our global food system is and how vulnerable we are. The situation goes beyond the traditional humanitarian dimension. It calls for a 'new world food order'.

In 2007-2008, because of high food prices, millions and millions of people were pushed into hunger. In 2009, as a consequence of the economic crisis, it is projected that some 100 million human beings would be added to the ranks of those who do not have adequate access to food.

Today, more people than ever are victims of hunger. Over one billion in total. In other words, one in every six persons suffers from hunger and malnutrition on a daily basis.

In addition, as of last April, 31 countries were in a situation of food crisis requiring emergency assistance. Of these, 20 in Africa, 9 in Asia and the Near East and 2 in Central America and the Caribbean.

This cannot be acceptable. How can we explain to people of good sense and good faith this dramatic situation in a state of abundance of international resources and when trillions of US dollars are being spent to salvage the international financial system.

The problem of food security is a political one. It is a question of priorities in the face of the most fundamental of human needs.

Plans, strategies and programmes to defeat hunger and malnutrition in the world do exist at national and regional level, even though in some cases they may need updating. In fact, as part of the preparations of the High-Level Conference on "How to Feed the World in 2050", to be held in Rome in October 2009, FAO is revising the Anti-Hunger Programme which was prepared in 2002 and is addressing all related issues.

It is true that international food commodity prices have come down from the peaks of June 2008, but it should be noted that they are still high by historical standards. In only two years, between 2006 and 2008, prices of basic foods rose by about 60 percent while those of grains doubled. As of last month, the average price of food was still 24 percent higher than in 2006 and 33 percent higher than in 2005.

The global financial crisis has attracted the full attention of the world. The G20 leaders have already met twice since last November and a third meeting is foreseen in the next fall. In their

meeting in London early April, they agreed on a financial stimulus package worth 1.1 trillion US dollars. I should say I was happy to note the renewed commitment to meeting the MDGs and to achieving official development assistance pledges.

The food security crisis requires no less attention for, in addition to its economic, social and ethical ramifications, it has proven to be a serious threat to peace and security in the world. The financial and economic crisis must not deter our attention from the food crisis, leading to further marginalization of the poor and the hungry.

The world has to ensure the food security of the one billion hungry people and also double food production to feed a population projected to reach 9.2 billion in 2050. And this has to be achieved in the face of several challenges, including demographic and dietary changes, climate change, bioenergy development and natural resources constraints.

Aware of the urgency of the situation and the paramount importance of food security for world stability, economic growth and prosperity, I took the initiative on 23 October 2008 on the occasion of World Food Day celebration in New York and in the presence of the UN Secretary-General and President Clinton to propose the convening of a Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2009.

I subsequently presented the proposal to membership in my statement to the Special FAO Conference in November 2008, and also submitted it to the Heads of State and Government of Member Nations for their consideration.

The proposal has received wide support from the different regions as reflected in declarations and resolutions of Summits of Heads of State and Government and Ministerial Meetings, and also by means of official letters of reply.

In light of the current state of international affairs, the case for a high political event, to keep world food security on top of the international agenda and tackle the root causes of hunger, is compelling. Hunger is on the rise and global food security is facing the greatest challenges of modern history.

While the two previous summits of 1996 and 2002 have effectively contributed to keep food and agriculture on the international community's agenda, the proposed summit should be about real changes. Decisions about policies and strategies have to be taken at the highest political level.

As I stated to the joint meeting of the Finance and Programme Committees last month, the Summit would be financed entirely from extra-budgetary resources, in full compliance with the Financial Regulations and with no negative impact on the regular programme of work of the Organization. It would build on the work of the High-Level Conference on "How to Feed the World in 2050", which was approved by the FAO Conference, and most of the technical documents would be prepared in advance using expert group meetings on subjects covered by normal activities of the Organization, with peer review for quality control, and in relation with the other ongoing processes.

Mr. Independent Chairman,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the current context of difficulties and challenges, it is the responsibility of us all – secretariat and the membership – to raise to the expectations of the hungry and the poor and also the hopes of the founding fathers of this very Organization. The current food security crisis cannot leave us indifferent.

In closing, I will reiterate that the challenge of eliminating hunger and malnutrition is no longer a question of lack of knowledge or means in the hands of the global community. The vision of a hunger-free world is possible if there is high-level political will. Concrete changes will be indispensable.

Although tempered by the recent ‘food, fuel and financial’ crisis, several countries have realized remarkable progress toward the achievement of the set goals of hunger reduction, including in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We know technically what should be done. We should build on these successes.

World leaders and the international community have to take courageous decisions and follow up with the required actions to eradicate hunger, totally and rapidly, as it has been decided regionally by the Latin American and Caribbean leaders, so that everyone on Earth can enjoy the most basic of human rights – the right to food, and thus to existence.

In a world with abundant resources, the persistence of hunger is a scandal. We have to act now – the hungry and poor cannot wait.

Conscious of this, Nehru recalled in his economic decisions some 60 years ago that “*Everything else can wait, but not agriculture*”.

So, let us not wait and stand up to our responsibility to ensure that food is on the table of everybody, today and tomorrow, allowing those suffering from hunger to liberate themselves from the yoke of unsatisfied basic biological needs to rise up to the spiritual and ethical vision of a world free from hunger.

While looking forward to the results of your deliberations, I wish you every success and good continuation in your work.

I thank you for your kind attention.