

Statement of the Director-General Elect
José Graziano da Silva to the
FAO Council
Hundred and Forty-third Session
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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Council, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I wish to thank you for inviting me to speak at this session of the Council. My presence here, in my capacity of Director-General Elect, confirms our mutual interest in working closely together.

Last April, I came before you as a candidate to present my proposals for FAO. I set out five pillars on which I considered we should focus: to eradicate hunger; to accelerate the shift towards truly sustainable food consumption and production systems; to promote greater fairness in the global management of food; to complete the agreed reform process improving decentralization; and to expand South-South Cooperation in FAO.

When we look back at the platforms of all the candidates, we find a pleasant convergence between their views on these priorities for FAO. The fact that we all addressed more or less the same issues is highly significant. It means that we have a common vision for the Organization's future, inspired by the goals for which it was originally created.

Now the time has come to begin our work together.

Distinguished Members of the Council,

Many countries are facing tremendous difficulties in their battle against hunger and malnutrition. If we do not focus on concrete actions, a large number of countries will fail to reach even the First Millennium Development Goal.

I will give a special focus in relation to this issue on two levels of action.

At the local level, I will scale up the support available to the low-income and food deficit countries, especially those facing protracted crises, guaranteeing FAO technical resources to a selected number of countries that ask for the Organization's assistance and commit themselves to eradicate hunger.

We also need to cut across the conventional divide between emergency interventions and development programmes, unifying their overall management under the responsibility of the FAO Representative; and ensuring that the fundamental problems that make populations vulnerable to hunger are addressed in ways that increase their capacity to gain resilience to future shocks.

To do so, I intend to create teams that draw together the Organization's skills in policy advice, investment planning, resource mobilization, emergency response and sustainable development. I will also take steps to deepen our collaboration at country level with other UN agencies, development partners, regional organizations and civil society already working in these countries. I look also to strengthen links with private sector enterprises that share our goals, as well as to mobilize additional support through South-South Cooperation.

At the global level: national efforts to combat hunger need to be complemented by a more efficient global governance system for food security.

A strengthened Committee on World Food Security must be a key part of any reinforced global governance system, and I look forward to work closely with the CFS. Let me take this

opportunity to congratulate Ambassador Olaniran Yaya for his election as Chairman of the CFS, and to thank Mr. De Luna for his leadership in the last two years.

I listened carefully to the twenty-two interventions made by Member Countries at the opening of this Council session, following the presentation of the CFS report. I can say that I fully agree with the suggestions made in the sense that we should concentrate more our discussions and have more concrete indications for decision making. In this context, I believe that a new instance of executive and strategic inter-agency coordination should be implemented, involving the Heads of FAO, IFAD and WFP, with a broad mandate to collaborate in the implementation of the decisions taken by CFS. The CFS Chair should be invited to participate in these coordination meetings. A fluid dialogue between this new mechanism and the CFS Bureau needs to be envisaged.

I also agree with the need to complete as soon as possible the Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Land Tenure, Fisheries and Forests (VGLT). I hope that this issue can be finished in the first semester of 2012.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In just one month's time, I shall assume the management of an Organization whose needs have never been so great, but that has lost the trust of some of its Members.

One symptom of this lack of trust has been the increased time that Member Countries spend looking into many details that do not correspond to the role of guidance expected from Governing Bodies.

Rebuilding trust must be based on the recognition that we – the Member Countries and the Secretariat – have shared goals and complementary responsibilities, as clearly established in our Constitution. Trust requires that we work together with total transparency.

Concluding FAO reform in a good way is necessary for the Organization to fulfil its mission efficiently and also to recover the trust of all Member Countries, and, as I have said before, I am committed to bring the reform to a satisfactory end.

The Immediate Plan of Action gives us the means to move quickly to complete the most important goals of the reform, so that the Organization can put its full effort into better delivering and responding to the challenges we face.

Reform is an instrument for creating trust, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability. But we cannot go on reforming forever!

Between 2009 and the end of the next biennium, the implementation of the reform alone will have cost nearly USD 90 million. If we add the cost of staff time that we have spent on this issue, the opportunity cost could be more than double this amount.

Just to make a rough comparison: as part of its emergency response to the Horn of Africa crisis, FAO has included, with great success, cash-for-work programmes. We are paying more than 60 000 Somali households three US dollars a day for 72 working days yearly, and we hope to reach a total of 130 000 households this year. All this will represent a total investment of less than USD 30 million in Somalia, or about one third of the amount that is expected to be spent on the reform process!

But the financial cost is not my main concern: I fear that in some cases the reform is making us look more and more inward, creating new bureaucracies, duplicating work and structures, making FAO bulkier instead of more efficient. What we really need is a fundamental change in the culture of the Organization so that we look outwards. We need to be motivated not so much

by our immediate personal concerns but by the imperative of addressing the real problems faced by 1 billion hungry people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Reform has put in place important changes, but there is still a lot to be done. I shall refer to one crucial component on which progress is seriously lagging behind – decentralization.

Having served in a regional office for five and a half years, I consider decentralization as one of the most crucial and strategic objectives of the reform process. We need to empower our decentralized offices, as the Governing bodies have urged us to do.

Strengthening FAO's worldwide presence is key to providing better services to governments in technical cooperation and policy assistance. I also see fieldwork as a necessary and important complement to our normative analysis. While our normative work should guide our interventions in the field, the hands-on learning process provides a valuable input for policy discussions at the global level. Our field programme and our normative analysis need to go hand-in-hand, re-energizing each other to make FAO a knowledge institution with its feet on the ground.

I also want to stress the importance of a bottom-up approach in our planning system to assure that the priorities we set in the budget respond to the real needs of our Member Countries.

This bottom-up approach, starting from the elaboration of the Country Programme Framework and moving up to the definition of sub-regional and regional priorities will be discussed first at the Regional Conferences and then considered by the FAO Conference. This will provide the Organization with a demand-driven process to define its work priorities and budget for the first time.

I also see that much more prioritization is needed in our work to assure that the Organization will not try to do all the things but concentrate on those where it really can make a difference and bring added value to the resources that Member Countries entrust to it.

I am also aware of the need to rationalize the FAO representation network. It is my intention to put forward a proposal on the decentralization aspects of the reform process to the next Regional Conferences and to ask Member Countries to start discussing the coverage issue.

I would also like to take that opportunity to request that some of the middle income countries of all regions consider changing the status of the FAO fully fledged Representations that they already have into Liaison Offices and increasing their support to maintain FAO's work in their territories. This can open up the opportunity to reallocate resources to the poorest countries in the same region. I would like to invite the Permanent Representatives of those countries to consult with their capitals about this idea.

Let me make it clear that I am not requesting additional funding from Member Countries for decentralization or for expanding coverage, but merely leeway to work within the limits of the approved budget. I will also look for additional savings that could be used to reinforce our decentralized offices, especially the multi-disciplinary teams at sub-regional level that should be the first door on which countries should knock to request FAO assistance.

Mr. Chairman, Members,

Let me refer now to some issues that I would like to have considered in future sessions of the Council.

The recent election of the Director-General marked a shift in FAO procedures and timeframes and exposed some flaws that need to be addressed. I think that we all agree that the length of

the electoral period proved to be excessive and the lack of rules posed some difficulties in achieving a smooth transition.

Let me also note that I will take up office leading a senior management team entirely set up during the current administration. Most countries and many international organizations have common rules governing transitional periods in order to leave room for the new administration to put in place a senior management team that shares its vision and goals.

Any new manager needs to have room to pick his own team, especially at higher-level positions, like Deputy Director-General (DDG) and Assistant Director-General (ADG) that are basically political appointments. These changes should be seen as natural in all organizations, inside and outside the UN system, and in respect of all democratic electoral processes such as the one we had in FAO.

Many countries feel under represented at the higher-levels of the Organization. We will need to rebalance the present distribution of high-level posts to express the new international reality, in which more and more countries are assuming relevant roles in international cooperation activities. In a consultative and transparent manner I intend to address this issue during 2012.

In the interest of continuity between administrations, any staff-related adjustments that I will make at the beginning of my term in office will address only those positions that I consider to be very necessary; and this will be done as part of a smooth process bearing in mind the need to avoid disruption.

In line with these comments, I want to suggest that Member Countries define a clear set of procedures to assure a formal and smoother transition in the future, that would not rely only on the good-will and the friendly relationship between the incumbent and the newly elected Director-General, as was the case between Mr. Diouf and myself.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members,

In the current biennium, the Organization listed some ten thousand activities in its Programme of Work and Budget. It is hard to see where the real priorities lie within such a wide spread of actions. We need to streamline activities, emphasize our main areas of interest and better focus our work.

In response to the request of the Finance Committee, I will try to identify further efficiency savings. I believe we still have room to lower costs, by decreasing the weight of some of the bureaucratic structures and processes that hinder the effectiveness of our Organization.

A leaner and more efficient FAO is in all of our interests. Best value for money is not only a demand from donor countries, but from all Member States. And in my view, being more efficient is essential for FAO to achieve a better delivery.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to reiterate that the FAO Staff, as the most valuable asset of this organization, deserves more attention and a much improved human resources management.

It is my intention to pay personal attention to human resource issues, including training, mobility and performance evaluation, putting in place mechanisms and procedures to ensure that implementation of transparent human resource policies. Management and staff must work together in a more collegiate and integrated manner to improve FAO's performance at all levels.

I also attach great importance to the communication activities to be performed by FAO. I refer to both – internal and external communications – that are two faces of the same coin. An

Organization without adequate corporate communication policy will face serious problems in transmitting right messages regarding its mission and the impact of the work it carries out on a daily basis.

Other themes that I intend to address from the beginning of the year include reaffirming FAO's interest in working jointly with the UN family, especially the Rome-based Agencies (WFP and IFAD) and Bioversity International, as well as other important agencies and the Regional Economic Commissions.

Within FAO, I intend to give special attention to prepare for and participate in the Regional Conferences. I would like to reiterate the importance of a high level participation in these meetings, especially of Ministers. In this context, I have invited the Independent Chairperson of the Council to participate in all Regional Conferences.

I would like to use this opportunity to brief members on how I intend to translate the priorities of my programme into my agenda during the first months of 2012.

In January, I have accepted an invitation from the German Minister of Agriculture to take part in the country's Green Week, which brings an opportunity to start examining issues of sustainability that will be at the top of the agenda of the Rio+20 meeting.

Afterwards I shall go to the World Economic Forum in Davos to reaffirm my commitment to strengthen interaction between FAO and the private sector. Immediately afterwards I will attend the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre to underline the importance I attach to the role of civil society.

At the end of January, I shall attend the African Union summit, where I will make it clear that Africa will continue to be the highest priority for FAO.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to thank Dr. Jacques Diouf, the incumbent Director-General, for all his support that started when I was preparing to launch the Zero Hunger Programme in December 2002, and to deeply acknowledge the invaluable contribution he has given during the past 18 years to the cause of food security, positioning the fight against hunger at the top of the global agenda. I hope I can count on his advice in the future.

I would also like to thank all Members of FAO for the confidence placed in me and remind them that I will have only 3 and a half years' mandate to achieve all the bold goals proposed. It is quite a short time, so I look forward to working with all of you in the coming years in a spirit of constructive partnership.

As my last remark, let me repeat what I already said to you last April: *"I will not be able to do anything except what we can do together"*.

Thank you.