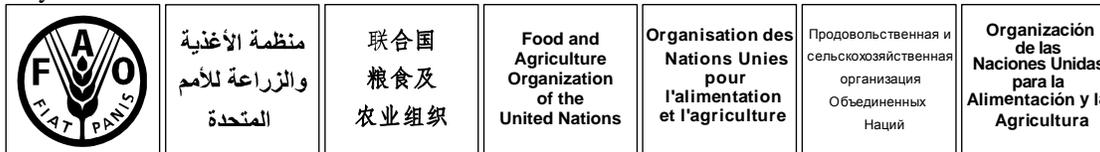


May 2012



# FAO Regional Conference for Africa

## TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION

**Brazzaville, Congo, 23-27 April, 2012**

### STATEMENT BY THE FAO DIRECTOR-GENERAL

*His Excellency, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock of Congo and Chairperson of the Conference,  
Mr. Rigobert Maboundou*

*Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, Mr. Luc Guyau,*

*Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security, Ambassador Yaya Olaniran,*

*Honourable Ministers,*

*Distinguished Delegates and Members of the Diplomatic corps,*

*Civil society representatives,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

## Introduction

1. It is an honour to be with you in Brazzaville, which hosts the Twenty-Seventh FAO Regional Conference for Africa
2. On behalf of FAO and of all the participants, I want to thank the Government and people of the Republic of Congo for the warm welcome and hospitality.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

3. Despite our best efforts since FAO was created in 1945 to contribute to a world without hunger, it is evident that our work is far from over: 925 million people still are food insecure.
4. In addition, around the world countries are facing climate, financial, economic and energy crises. These are crises that affect and are affected by each other. FAO needs to adapt to this context to better serve the needs of its Members.
5. To do so, in January 2012 I launched a Strategic Thinking Process that will inform adjustments to our current Programme of Work and Budget, contribute to the review of our Strategic Framework and help create our new Medium-Term Plan.
6. The Regional Conferences, that are now part of FAO's global governance structure, are giving important inputs to this process. Your proposals will help us to assure that our work answers the needs you have, in a bottom-up approach that has been implemented for the first time in FAO's history.
7. I am confident that this exercise will enable us to translate the vision we share, the vision of a food-secure world, into concrete action at the global, regional and local levels.

## Global challenges

*Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen,*

8. So far, we have identified seven global challenges, as you had the opportunity to be informed in this conference. Many of these global challenges are also African challenges. That said, I want to reaffirm my - and FAO's - commitment to a hunger-free Africa. We will do all within our reach to strengthen agriculture and food security in the continent and help it become the breadbasket of the world.
9. To do so, we will work:
  - under African leadership – governments, the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS, in its French acronym) and other subregional authorities,
  - within the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), and
  - with regional and international partners, civil society and the private sector.
10. Initially, we will put this approach into action in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

11. This is my second mission to Africa this year. Soon after taking up office, I visited Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. During that mission, I announced the end of famine conditions in Somalia.

12. This is no small feat. Measures including cash for work programs, input distribution, livestock vaccination and destocking and restocking, have allowed farmers and pastoralists to make the best use of a good rainy season.
13. Overcoming famine was by no means the result of FAO's effort alone: we were, and are, working closely with other UN partners, including UNDP, UNICEF and WFP, with regional bodies such as the IGAD and the African Union, with NGOs and civil society organizations and with the farmers, pastoralists and cooperatives.
14. In the Horn of Africa, we are losing the opportunity to build on our recent gains and assure resilience for their population to face future droughts. In the Sahel, this means not putting in place measures that could prevent the food security situation from worsening.
15. Lives are at risk: over 8 million people in the Horn of Africa and 16 million in the Sahel are currently food insecure.
16. In the Sahel and other Africa countries, a complex security situation is making matters worse. We need peace to have food security, but let's not forget that agriculture, rural development and food security are also drivers of peace.
17. I urge the donor community to respond, despite the economic crises that many countries are facing. It is in times of crises that the vulnerable populations need us the most.
18. And times like these should make us understand that we cannot afford to continue jumping from crisis to crisis. Every time we turn our backs to fragile gains we are leaving the door open to another emergency.
19. Improving livelihoods, building resilience, shifting to more sustainable production patterns and ending hunger require a longer-term approach. Their results are visible in emergencies. For example: when funding became available to respond to the drought in Somalia last year, we were able to buy seeds locally thanks to longer-term FAO support to seed multiplication in the country.
20. We know what needs to be done, but we cannot do it without a sustained effort, and that includes funding.
21. In March, FAO requested an additional 50 million dollars for its emergency plan to assist farmers and pastoralists in the Horn of Africa. Until now, no new resources have been committed. In the Sahel, we have a funding gap of over 60 million dollars for our immediate action plan.
22. Ending hunger is not, however, a responsibility of the international community alone. African nations and institutions need to put fighting hunger and building resilience at the top of their agenda. In the end, it is up to each country to build the institutions and infrastructure that will allow the continent to realize its vast agricultural potential and free itself from hunger.
23. I also call upon developing countries, and in particular African oil and mineral commodity export countries, to increase their contributions as well. This does not necessarily mean through funds, it can also mean by sharing experience and knowledge. Let's use South-South Cooperation to express our solidarity with our neighbouring continents and I take this opportunity to thank the President of Congo Brazzaville for his generous offer made in his speech this morning.
24. I call upon governments to reaffirm their commitment to end hunger and to lead this effort. This will not fall on deaf ears.
25. You can count FAO as your partner to reach a hunger-free Africa. Let us give a strong message in this conference that we are committed to that goal.
26. Other actors will renew their commitment as well. And, as 2012 is the International Year of Cooperatives, I want to highlight the role of cooperatives and smallholder associations in promoting food security and rural development.

27. The private sector also has a role to play. It will be responsible for the bulk of investment that agriculture needs. Governments should invest in infrastructure and services that will attract investment and, at the same time, safeguard the rights and needs of the local population.

28. The Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests, in the Context of National Food Security, to be endorsed by the Committee of World Food Security in May, provides a framework that will help strike this balance. FAO stands ready to assist countries in adopting and implementing the guidelines.

29. Allow me to stress, also, the importance of intra-African trade for socio-economic development and the fight against hunger. The continent spends over 50 billion dollars annually on food imports. At the same time, over 50 percent of its labour force is made up of smallholder farmers, herders, foresters and fishers. Let's find ways to put them together so that Africa can feed Africa.

## **Decentralization**

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

30. Before ending, I want to touch on the issue of decentralization, so necessary to provide a better balance between FAO's functions and its global and national presence.

31. We are reviewing the way we select and evaluate FAO Representatives, to make sure that we have the best person for each office. Regional and Subregional offices will participate in this process. Serving as a Representative will also be part of the career path for strong performing staff, with promotions provided for outstanding performance.

32. I want to add that decentralization is not only about increasing staff members in regions. It has to do with empowering FAO Representatives, especially at the regional and subregional levels. That means delegating higher responsibilities, providing leeway for decision-making and to manage funds. It also means greater accountability.

33. Any changes that might emerge from your deliberations will eventually be discussed by the Governing Bodies at the global level and would be conditional on resource availability.

34. Ladies and gentlemen, we have tough times ahead of us. But we also have all we need to rise above them. Let us work together to transform our vision into concrete actions, for a prosperous, dynamic, hunger-free and food-secure Africa!

Thank you.