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STATEMENT BY MR ANTOINE SAINTRAINT, INDEPENDENT CHAIRMAN
OF THE COUNCIL

Mr Chairman,

It is my duty as the Independent Chairman of the Council to follow the impressive address by the Director-General with a report on the activities of your Council and its Chairman during the last biennium.

I shall divide my statement into two parts:

- In the first part I shall summarize the activities of the Council; the questions of principle which the Conference will be reviewing all appear on the draft agenda of the Conference, which has already been adopted;
- the second part will allow me the opportunity to bring up a number of considerations which, as I conclude the exercise of my functions, I feel I should share with you. These considerations arise out of conclusions I have reached during the course of my two terms as Independent Chairman, and my participation in various sessions of the Council's Restricted Committees.

Your Council, Mr Chairman, has held four major sessions since the last Conference in November 1991: these were the 101st, 102nd, 103rd and 104th Sessions of the Council. As is customary, the 101st Session proceeded to the various elections of the Restricted Committees: the Programme Committee, the Finance Committee, the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters. It also proceeded to elect the members of the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes of WFP.

In my capacity as Independent Chairman of the Council, I had the opportunity in 1992 to follow the various Regional Conferences of FAO: Delhi in February for Asia and the Pacific, Teheran in May for the Near East, Accra in July for Africa, Prague in August for Europe, and lastly, in September, for Latin America and the Caribbean, in Montevideo. I was thus able to gauge the importance of the regional dimension of FAO's activities in the world. I deeply believe that the Regional Offices play an essential role and one which should be reinforced in future by more substantial financial backing.

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The Council held a brief but very busy session in November 1992, and was able to examine all of the major items which were covered in a very exhaustive report.

The reports of the 64th and 65th Sessions of the Programme Committee, and of the 73rd and 74th Sessions of the Finance Committee were reviewed at length, as were the reports of the 58th and 59th Sessions of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters. Substantial progress was achieved in the area of international fisheries, particularly for what concerns responsible fishing and the legal regime for fishing on the high seas.

Only one amendment, tending to incorporate into the Financial Rules the provisions of the relevant Conference resolutions concerning the Special Reserve Account, could not go through due to its obstruction by a small minority of the Council members: the Conference being sovereign in these matters, these resolutions have the same scope and value as the Financial Rules, but it would have been more transparent to incorporate these decisions into the Financial Rules of the Organization.

During this session, progress was also made in the creation of a Consultative Group on the Tropical Forests Action Programme; I personally worked very hard to pave the way for a favourable decision, which was adopted during the June 1993 session.

During the 103rd Session in June 1993, the Council reviewed the reports of a series of committees; World Food Security, Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, etc... The reports of the 75th and 76th Sessions of the Finance Committee, and of the 66th and 67th Sessions of the Programme Committee were also reviewed.

The 1992-93 Programme was examined in detail, as was the Draft Programme of Work and Budget for 1994-95.

The decision to establish a TFAP Advisory Group was unanimous. It now remains only to find the financing which will allow the Group to launch its activities, and hopefully, this will be possible in the not too distant future.

The report of the 67th Session of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters was reviewed in depth. Thanks to the constitution of a Technical Committee, substantial progress was made with respect to the Draft Agreement on the Flagging of Vessels Fishing on the High Seas. At its last session in early November, your Council had already carefully prepared the current 27th Session of the Conference of FAO.

During its 104th Session, your Council, Mr Chairman, had before it the reports of the 68th Session of the Programme Committee and of the 77th Session of the Finance Committee. It also reviewed the report of the 61st Session of the CCLM.

Thanks to the work of your Council, which over the last two years has consistently unfolded in an extremely frank, open and cordial atmosphere, the Council was able to take a series of important decisions within its sphere of competence and prepare resolutions for the Conference which I am sure will meet with the agreement of almost all, if not all, FAO Member Nations.

The 1994-1995 Programme of Work and Budget was discussed at great length. All explanations were given patiently and in minute detail and no question remained unanswered. For this I can only thank the FAO Secretariat, for it did a job which only those who were able to follow the preparation of the budget from February 1993 to the present can fully appreciate.

Mr Chairman,

The Council of FAO has coped, under difficult circumstances, with a sometimes unrewarding but always exciting task, being truly "involved" in the life of the Organization. I shall say no more. The excellent reports published at the conclusion of each Council are major background documents which deserve to be consulted and consulted often. They have allowed me to be very brief in this concise report which I have just presented, and to dwell a little longer over the second part in which, as I mentioned, I share with you some considerations, which are perhaps a bit improvised, but which I hope will give the Council and its subsidiary bodies some food for thought in the future.

I now come, Mr Chairman, to the second part of my statement which I hope will be as concrete and constructive as possible.

As the circumstances of life would have it, before being elected in 1989 at the close of a competition which was sometimes rather painful for me, I had the opportunity to exercise the functions of Ambassador and Permanent Representative to United Nations organizations in Rome. Little by little, I came to know our Organization, both its strong points and its weak points, in the course of a long and patient study. Mr Chairman, I have heard so many snap judgements and met so many people who had seen it all and knew it all, and who proffered final judgements on the Organization while knowing nothing about it or very little! How many times have I heard people speak about the unwieldiness and heaviness of the UN special agencies and their inability to take up the challenges facing our world. I myself shared this approach in the past. Mr Chairman, I lived for 10 years on the African continent, for over eight years in Latin America, and have travelled a great deal in Asia. I believed in bilateral cooperation, before I became a witness to its progressive breakdown and virtually total and complete collapse in the midst of a nostalgia for a bygone era. Not long ago, someone was telling me about the sterile and vain speeches and discussions of the major UN assemblies where so much time was lost over game-playing that produced nothing specific, concrete and operational.

Meanwhile the problems of our world and the scope of their implications led me to a profound conviction of the total bankruptcy of bilateral cooperation, and my experience of the multilateral system convinced me that it is now the only feasible way to achieve global integrated strategies and a global vision of the world's problems. International cooperation, even for those who do not believe in it and even for those who barely do, is absolutely essential because there is no country which can now live in autarky, and because every problem now needs to be settled in accordance with a global vision.

So far as I am concerned, I have always found there to be an appalling gap between discussions and declarations of intent, and action, and I have rarely seen concepts and ideas actually translated into actions and operations. Words are mouthed, the big problems are discussed, sustainable development is talked about, and in the incapacity to come up with projects and programmes which would imply major sacrifices, committees are formed. What is the upshot of all those seminars, caucuses, all those shows which have no follow-up and often no tomorrow? Parliamentary democracies have a short-term view of things, four years, five years, sometimes six: in short, the length of the term of parliamentary or presidential term of office.

The essential task of the multilateral system is to pursue a long-term vision. This is both the greatness and the immense difficulty of an organization such as ours: both to be operational and to remain democratic, as we have so far successfully managed to do.

FAO, a data and information centre unique in the world, is also a technical and political forum for all of the major problems of agriculture, forestry and fisheries and their main natural extensions, environment and nutrition. FAO's third mission, after documentation and information, and as a technical and political forum, is of course the Field Programme which has been discussed at great length here, since the Director-General has given the best of himself to make the Organization into something other than a study and documentation centre to serve only some..., making it instead into a centre which could provide a response on the ground through its field programmes and projects to all of the acute questions which arise in the world.

I have often said that our field projects and programmes are the lifeblood and the driving-force of our Organization. I also deeply believe that by repeating over and over a certain number of fundamental truths, some messages, or some parts of the message, do, in the end, get through. I have noticed a change in attitudes in the last four years. No one today would have the temerity to openly question the Field Programme, the Technical Cooperation Programme or the FAO Representations in the various countries of the world. The interpenetration between the technical and scientific levels of the various technical services of FAO and the field programmes are so obvious that we may well wonder how they could have been a source of discussion for so long. We cannot for one second imagine the existence of a valid veterinary service or of a plant nutrition service, or of a water service, or soils, or fisheries, or forestry, or food security, or nutrition, without their extension into the field in the form of specific, concrete, high-quality activities which provide technology transfer and state-of-the-art technology in a disinterested fashion (as bilateral cooperation almost never seems to do).

The Field Programme could not exist without strong, competent and experienced headquarters back-up, and the headquarters staff would be irrelevant were it not fully involved in the Field Programmes.

The only reproach which I could perhaps address to our Organization is that it sometimes gives too much weight to some of the support divisions which then become a drag on activities rather than a spur.

The major financial problems which the Organization has experienced have prevented the staff renewal necessary to maintain its great competence and to continually upgrade the level of training (regrettably, no longer possible for the moment). Something must be done so that all members of our Organization are aware of the responsibilities they bear, and if certain countries believe that they are not capable of assuming a certain share of the contributions, it seems to me that it would be preferable to lower this share but then actually honour this obligation. It is a requirement of international existence that obligations undertaken by nations, rather than being submitted to national parliaments, are governed by respect for international law, which is formulated very slowly over time with much back and forth and many difficulties, but which, tomorrow, must govern our common existence.

In my discussion of the interdependence of field and headquarters activities, I could not fail to evoke the parallel relationship between the Regular Programme and the Field Programme, so far as the budget is concerned. I have often listened to pleas, on behalf of transparency, asking that the Field Programme not be financed out of the Regular Programme, which certainly shows that some have still understood nothing about the functions and responsibilities of our Organization. Indeed what is involved is not simply financial resources, but primarily the transfer of knowledge, skills and intelligence, and this is difficult or impossible to quantify in monetary terms.

If part of the Regular Programme can be used for the Field Programme, so much the better. And I say to all those who, on behalf of transparency, refuse to allocate financial resources out of the Regular Programme for Field Programmes (and they are almost all representatives of countries with no trust fund programmes), that they are going against the grain of FAO's fundamental orientations

and against the true spirit which underlay FAO's creation nearly half a century ago. I can do no better than to advise them to reread the preamble of our Constitution and to say, once again, that the financial resources made available to our Organization are absolutely ridiculous when set against the needs of the world. The FAO regular budget for a biennium represents less than the cooperation budget for one year for a country such as mine which does not manage to utilize it with a minimum of efficiency! If we think that the population of our planet will go from 5 to 8 billion in less than a quarter of a century, if we recall that the population of the world grows by 250 000 people each day, if we remember that one billion human beings suffer from undernourishment — well, this has been said again and again here in this same room. I said one day during an FAO Conference that the pet food trade for certain species of small domestic animals such as cats, dogs and canaries amounts to a sum immensely greater than FAO's budgetary and extra-budgetary resources! I have often suffered to hear people speak in defence of morally untenable and egotistical positions. While I respect the men and women who defend these positions, I shall never stop fighting against privileges which belong to a bygone era.

How many times have I heard people say that the rich countries too have their difficulties, and yet how can one decently compare the situation of a country with a per caput gross national product of 18 000 dollars, with that of a country whose GNP amounts to less than 600 dollars a year?

How many times have I heard informal groups, pressure groups who defend the interests of the powerful of this world, speak in defense of zero growth? This internal contradiction in terms is a cover-up for a great deal of selfishness and unwillingness to stand shoulder to shoulder to build this world. Zero growth is not only non-growth, it is above all a permanent, conscious and constant retreat in the face of constantly growing needs.

I have not heard very many voices raised against this concept of zero growth, which is a piece of complete nonsense from an Alice-in-Wonderland world. At a time when increasingly massive amounts of money virtually elude government control, moving across national boundaries at electronic speed, we are witness to a series of retreats and of shallow self-interest which borders upon complete and total indifference. How far we are from the international commitment to devote 0.7 percent of the GNP to international cooperation! The problems keep getting bigger: pollution, environmental degradation, mushrooming megalopolises, the need for emergency relief — and the resources keep getting smaller.

Some few countries have attained the target set a quarter of a century ago. Regrettably, they all too often throw their commitments into question, and those who have never achieved the target fail to even make the necessary effort to improve the situation. Additionally, at the present time we are seeing an appalling diversion of resources meant for development and now being used for so-called "humanitarian" operations which are really police operations that are increasingly difficult to cover financially.

I have regularly heard certain members of the Organization declare, as a justification for the maintenance of a reduced multilateral budget, that priorities had to be set. Never, and I mean never, were the informal discussion groups able to establish just which were the priority areas with respect to less priority areas, or non-priority areas, or sectors to be eliminated altogether. It is easy to make resounding declarations on allocating priority to certain fashionable sectors, but having said that, one should have the courage to determine which sectors could then be overlooked, reduced or even eliminated. The only concrete proposal which I have heard in four years was to reduce the number of guards, which was fairly hare-brained as a proposal.

I know that at this time, in the light of the extraordinary advances of the communications and information media, many wonder whether it is still possible and reasonable to pursue aid to development, and whether it might not be better to concentrate resources on food aid, emergency relief and the debt problem, so as to bridge gaps and prepare for a better future. It is too often

forgotten that the so-called "developed" countries also lived through centuries of internal struggle, divisions, rifts, famine, and the violation of human rights. And so, despite the repeated hammering of televised images, it is up to organizations such as ours to pursue the work of development despite all these difficulties and at the same time scrupulously avoiding taking populations hostage by using cooperation as a means of exerting political pressure. This is one of the major lessons that I have learned from the example and vision of one of my predecessors, Josué de Castro, who died 20 years ago and who devoted his entire life to trying to improve the lot of the peasant populations of the world. There is much talk at present about human rights, but so little is done to enable human beings to meet their primary need, which is the need to feed themselves. Similarly, little has been done regarding the International Emergency Food Reserve and modern streamlined stockpiling for rapid response in times of famine. The same applies to international trade. There has been much talk on world trade in this assembly, but all too often we forget that it only concerns a very small proportion of the world's population; in fact, 87 percent of international trade is for 10 percent of the world's population. Surely it is time we examined our consciences and asked ourselves why some of the institutions in which we have placed so much hope are unable to function. I refer to the Common Fund for Commodities which has such derisory resources and from which a number of important countries are already withdrawing. I shall never forget the negative and even violent reactions of these countries when I criticized them for withdrawing from a United Nations organization. Solidarity in a multilateral system has to be global; we cannot take part in organizations when it is in our interest to do so and be totally absent where we might have to make sacrifices. Mr Chairman, my association with the work of the restricted committees and my participation in these committees has provided some unusual experiences. The mere act of giving straightforward objective information was considered by some parties to be unacceptable political interference that should even be kept out of the records.

As I have said, one of the main characteristics of our Organization is that it has managed to remain democratic. Whether a country is rich or poor, large or small, it has the right to make itself heard, the right to impress its point of view and its outlook. In democracies, both a millionaire and a tramp have the same political rights. I think therefore that consensus on sensitive and contentious issues should not result in what I would call the "common denominator of mediocrity". For some, consensus has become or is becoming a sort of right of veto to block and undermine the wishes of the very large majority. There is a strong danger of seeing international democracy hampered and hobbled by the establishment of the so-called rule of consensus. This is not possible if we are to meet the challenges of the world, to rise above national self-interest and provide for greater justice in a world economy not governed by the law of the jungle, in which the weak are not subjugated by the strong.

Mr Chairman, during these last years a number of very specific and very real problems have been discussed at length, resulting in clear and unequivocal decisions by the Conference, the supreme body of FAO. These problems have included the lapse factor, the existence and functioning of the Special Reserve Account and the allocation of arrears, for which clear-cut decisions have been made by a very large majority on the basis of painstaking documentation and detailed explanations that have been repeated over and over. Yet, time and time again, lobbies mainly concerned about the reduction in the Organization's wherewithal to act, regularly question decisions that have been democratically reached within this assembly. The decision-making process must, Mr Chairman, remain democratic and constant vigilance is required to ensure that it does, otherwise the very foundations of the Organization will be undermined.

My recent years in FAO have been extremely eventful. There has been much talk of reforming, reviewing and revitalizing both the Organization and its governing bodies. The restricted committees will not function better unless the Member States realize that they need to delegate high-calibre men and women who are flexible, forward-looking and open to the world, which unfortunately is not always the case today. The same applies to Headquarters personnel. Very often, countries try

to shelve their mediocre elements in international organizations which should in fact only be sent the best.

I have often said that FAO's greatest asset is the quality of its staff members and their extraordinary diversity of languages, cultures and traditions. We must therefore resist nepotism and this tendency of getting rid of troublemakers by offering them an important post in the multilateral sector. In short, less "cronyism" and more professionalism!

A multilateral spirit also calls for considerable flexibility with regard to quota arrangements.

There has been a lot of talk of reforming the United Nations system and coordinating the efforts of all international organizations. I have studied the plans of those who think that a building can be constructed from the top rather than the bottom. I have been present at the serious crisis of the UNDP whose consequences weigh so heavily on FAO. The idea of establishing a development council at the top makes no sense as within the areas of the Organization's competence, everybody is involved in everything and particularly in topical issues: environment, sustainable development, the follow-up to Rio, forests, tropical timber, the promotion of women, target populations, and so on.

The United Nations must make use of the existing major specialized agencies and delimit as clearly as possible their respective areas of competence. FAO's is manifestly clear, so it is all the more regrettable to see that some issues (for example, forestry) are discussed in so many different fora, and that there are even moves to establish new bodies to undertake missions that are the very *raison d'être* of our Organization. We could talk for hours on this subject, but I would be failing in my duty if I did not mention the vital coordination that is needed between the agricultural agencies and particularly those located in Rome. I have deplored, and continue to deplore, the fact that the World Food Programme has wanted to set up as a separate development agency, when its activities are so undeniably interlinked and interdependent with those of FAO. For shabby personal reasons, some countries have helped to cut the ties that linked our Organization to the World Food Programme. There was also talk of using as retribution an instrument that can only be used, both now and in the future, for aid and relief. I know that one day these ties will have to be re-established. Though deplorably isolated in the hinterland of Via Laurentina, I hope that WFP will nevertheless continue to hold its big meetings at FAO. Otherwise the victors will be those who have fought for divorce and physical separation, but their victory will be very hollow and short-lived. It will be difficult, very difficult to re-establish the links, but one day this will have to be done.

And surely there is a need to review the statutes and functioning of IFAD, which has evolved from development bank to development agency, supposedly dispensing technical solutions but lacking the necessary skills, even though the Fund has notable resources. Organizing an annual major conference of its governors and a series of events on the most varied of topics, in the belief that this will produce a magic formula to help the poorest of the poor, does not help it to comply modestly with its task, which should be to fund sound projects and programmes and work hand-in-hand with an executing agency such as ours. Granting hard-currency loans, even under extremely concessional terms, can only add to the Third World's debt burden and place a number of countries, who will have to make their repayments in hard currency, in an impossible situation.

Improving the lot of rural women and helping rural communities to meet their own needs has not created hard currency in the past, and will not do so in the future. Countries are often represented in different international bodies by different people, and they would do well to realize that coordination is only possible if there is one authority and one person in charge. Coordination is a popular panacea, but in fact it is courage that will be needed in order to revamp FAO's role as joint guardian of the World Food Programme. IFAD is set to become a major funder of the WFP, in line with its basic role as a development fund. Perhaps we should rethink this role, dovetailing it with the future tasks of the investment centre; and here the role of the World Bank and of USAID also needs to be clearly specified.

- The same applies to linkage with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, where each centre currently pursues the policy laid down by its own management, without necessarily adapting to the priorities of world needs. The role of the CGIAR technical advisory committee should be reviewed in order to improve coordination with the Organization.

Before concluding, Mr Chairman, I should like to say a few words about the great hopes which were aroused by the accession to FAO of a Regional Economic Integration Organization: the European Community. Our 1991 Conference amended FAO's Basic Texts so as to allow the EC to become a full member. This was preceded by protracted negotiations in which I played a very active role. The vast majority of FAO members supported the application, having been assured that the Community would play an active role in FAO field projects and programmes. We are mindful that we live in a lopsided world, in which groups such as the EC (which accounts for well over two thirds of FAO's contributions) must be able to play an active role. Sadly, two years on, achievements have only been modest. A cooperation agreement has been signed, together with a convention on practical and budgetary implementation arrangements; these are to use trust funds - a simple and practical method. There is no denying that the Community has been rather sluggish, and its excess of red tape - with operations divided among so many Directorates-General - has made it unable to live up to the high hopes raised by the EC's move to become a full-fledged member of FAO.

A coordination mechanism has been set up in Brussels under the auspices of the Directorate-General for External Relations. The relevant departments meet weekly, but little has been achieved so far. And yet by extending its horizons beyond former colonies and the Member States, the EC could play a key role in all FAO activity areas if it could transcend the strict national interests of its Member States. I must confess to a feeling of deep disappointment, not to say frustration. Remembering the promises made and the commitments entered into, all I can do is pass the baton on to my successor, the new Independent Chairman of the Council whom you are to elect at the end of the Conference. I shall remind him of the commitments made and will press him most strongly to ensure that the EC's presence at FAO and on the Council is not just a symbolic one, and that it means more than just statements reflecting the lowest common denominator consensus of the twelve Member States. Vigorous and enthusiastic participation, backed by the significant funding available to the EC, should help us to tackle the greatest challenge the world has yet faced. I believe there are grounds for hoping that the EC can play an effective part in the harmonious development on which our future depends.

Mr Chairman,

My statement is nearing its end. It may have been too long, but it certainly has not covered everything. For example, I have not mentioned FAO's important normative role, and the way it acts as a catalyst and adviser for governments. And I have probably not said enough about the role of the Third World rural sector and the need to give thought to the key role it must play.

I should also have said more about the role of the FAO country and regional offices, and driven home the importance of decentralizing powers to the regional offices and expanding their mission.

I should like to thank all those who supported my candidacy for the important office of Chairman of your Council back in 1989. I must also thank the majority of the international community who put their faith in me and secured my election. My thanks must also go to those who opposed my candidacy and thus forced me to rebut their arguments, clarify my views and formulate a vision which may in some way help us fulfil the weighty task facing our Organization. The world today is marked by a large number of divisions and confrontations. But it is also marked by a spirit of fellow-feeling and fraternity, and by an abiding concern to improve the lot of the poorest and neediest. I was particularly pleased at the fact that my job bears the title of "Independent" Chairman. Independence is not the same thing as neutrality or impartiality, and I am sure that I have often acted

with a degree of partiality, although in so doing I was only following a precedent set by many of my predecessors. Thus I have sought in some manner to uphold the directives enshrined in the FAO Constitution.

Dostoievski said in his great novel "The Brothers Karamazov" that each of us bears universal responsibility before our fellow human beings. This is the spirit in which I have sought to play my small part, and this is the ideal that I hope we can all embrace.

Mr Chairman, thank you.