



COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY

Thirty-sixth Session

Rome, 11-14 and 16 October 2010

STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF FAO

*Mr Chairperson and Members of the Committee Bureau,
Madam Executive Director of WFP,
Mme Vice-President of IFAD,
Mr. Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General
Dear Mr. Swaminathan, Chairman of the Steering Committee of the HL Panel of Experts,
Members of the Advisory Group,
Distinguished Ministers,
Honourable Delegates and Observers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I wish first of all to express to you my appreciation for being in Rome this week to participate in the Thirty-sixth Session of the Committee on World Food Security. Your presence in such large numbers testifies to the importance you attach to the work of the Committee. This is indeed a memorable session. It is the first to be held in the framework of the renewed CFS.

The reform of the CFS, which was approved at the 35th session last October and subsequently by the FAO Conference in November 2009, aims to strengthen the Committee considerably and make it an inclusive international platform for policy convergence and the coordination of expertise and action in the fight against hunger in the world.

I would like to thank all those who have worked tirelessly to implement the reform and to help organize this session, which promises to be highly interactive, results-oriented and focused on providing specific recommendations on key aspects affecting food security at the country, regional and global levels. My sincere gratitude goes to the members of the CFS Bureau under the guidance of the Chairperson Mr. Noel De Luna, to the Bureau's Advisory Board and to the expanded Secretariat.

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A renewed and revitalized CFS could not emerge at a more appropriate time. I would like to assure you of my personal commitment, as well as of FAO's, to the reform of the Committee so it can fully play its role in the global food security governance system.

The need for the CFS reform rose in a context where hunger was rapidly increasing as a result of sharp spikes in food commodity prices. The combination of the global food crisis followed by the economic recession pushed the number of hungry people beyond the one billion mark. And while the latest SOFI data show that the number of hungry people should decline in 2010 to 925 million, due primarily to better economic prospects and lower food prices, it remains unacceptably high. It is higher than the level that existed when heads of state and government committed to reduce hunger by half at the World Food Summit in 1996. Moreover, there are 30 countries in a state of serious food crisis requiring emergency aid.

The presence of widespread hunger, malnutrition and poverty and the inability to protect vulnerable countries and people from the effect of shocks points to a structural, more profound problem of food insecurity that requires urgent, resolute and concerted action by all relevant actors and at all levels.

The world has also to grapple with a declining rate of growth in agricultural productivity, including that of the major cereals. Yet agricultural production will need to increase by 70% in the world and double in the developing countries in order to feed a global population expected to reach 9.1 billion in 2050. All this will have to occur in the face of climate change and scarce natural resources.

Another factor that needs urgent attention is the increased instability in commodity markets as reflected by more volatile prices. Unilateral decisions by countries to restrict exports tend to aggravate the situation and result in increased speculation. I am glad that this issue is going to be debated during your work this week.

Global problems demand international as well as local solutions. The complexity and multi-dimensional causes of hunger demand the participation of a wide array of stakeholders in seeking ways to eradicate it. The renewed CFS, as the basis for a global multi-stakeholder partnership constitutes the required platform for debating complex problems and reaching consensus on solutions. The intergovernmental and non-governmental nature of the CFS provides political legitimacy, while the high-level expert advice will ensure that the decisions taken are based on sound science and objective analysis.

The renewed CFS is called upon to fill a fundamental gap between increasing complexity and globalization of the food and agricultural system. It needs to ensure a more coordinated governance system with coherent and effective long-term action.

The Chairperson of the CFS Bureau will give you more details about the progress realized towards CFS reform over the past year. It is encouraging to see that the Committee has already become more inclusive through the establishment of its new expanded Bureau, an Advisory Group and, more recently, the Steering Committee of the High-Level Panel of Experts. In this regard, I wish to congratulate Professor Swaminathan, who is with us today, for his nomination as Chairperson of the Steering Committee, and to assure him and his Committee of our full support.

Another important achievement has been the extended CFS Secretariat, which now includes staff members from WFP and IFAD.

Civil society and the private sector represent a formidable political, social and economic force at all levels. Their representatives played an essential role in the successful negotiations of the reform document, but also in the ensuing inter-sessional meetings of the Bureau and the Advisory Group.

However, for the CFS to be a high-level intergovernmental decision-making process and thus acquire the needed political legitimacy, governments need to be represented at high level, ministerial if possible, in its meetings. Further to key technical ministries and departments, the participation of ministries responsible for cooperation and development is also required. In this

regard, I am extremely pleased about the presence of a number of ministers among us and wish to extend a special welcome to them.

For the CFS to be concrete in action and achieve tangible results, it is also vital that partnerships and linkages be established at country level through proper and recognized mechanisms, like the thematic groups and national alliances for food security. These mechanisms should give support to responsible authorities to ensure rational allocation of resources and successful implementation of decisions and programmes.

Besides ensuring that the renovated CFS functions efficiently, we need to make sure that it is used to intervene meaningfully and effectively in the fight against hunger. At the end of the day, we will be evaluated and judged based on results and not on process. A global strategy is needed to combine the energy of all relevant actors, each based on its comparative advantage. For it to be successful, we need to build on existing successes and best practices.

This was repeatedly and clearly stated in several intergovernmental meetings, confirming the need to avoid creating new bodies and mechanisms.

FAO is fully committed to the exercise. Its expertise, experience, multidisciplinary and wide field presence are vital features. Successes in fighting rinderpest, in dealing with Avian Flu and desert locust, in monitoring food security through the Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS), and in setting up bodies such as Codex Alimentarius and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, but also in the assistance to governments to prepare plans, programmes and projects for food security, just to mention a few, are real assets for the CFS renewal.

To be credible, the High-Level Panel of Experts should aim to reflect a broad range of views and wide geographical coverage. Its assessment will need to be based on peer-reviewed data, studies and research results available in the scientific and technical spheres as well as on work carried out by specialised institutions.

In that sense, FAO has a central role to play in the success of the CFS reform building on the idea of the Global Partnership for Food and Agriculture. Besides its various sectoral technical committees (COAG, CCP, COFO, COFI), FAO has a long-standing history in working with expert bodies and advisory panels and in networking with centres of excellence in all disciplines of food and agriculture.

The Organization also produces many flagship publications that are renowned worldwide, including the *State of Food and Agriculture* (SOFA), the *State of Food Insecurity in the World* (SOFI), the *State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture* (SOFIA), the *State of the World's Forests* (SOFO), the *State of Agricultural Commodity Markets* (SOCO), in addition to the global perspectives reports like *World Agriculture: towards 2015/2030*.

*Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers and Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I trust that this historic session will launch the CFS towards its vision of “constituting the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for a broad range of committed stakeholders to work together in a coordinated manner and in support of country-led processes towards the elimination of hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all human beings.”

I eagerly await the outcome of your deliberations.

I wish you every success in your work, and thank you for your kind attention.