



COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY

Thirty-sixth Session

Rome, 11-14 and 16 October 2010

STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (WFP)

We gather today, none too early, because after many months of hard work the world has come together in a reformed Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Chairman De Luna, and all the nations that worked hard for this goal, our congratulations to you for this great achievement.

The new CFS is designed to provide global leadership, support and practical solutions for the nations of the world in the noble and achievable quest to end the age-old scourge of hunger and malnutrition. Why is this achievable? Because many nations have proven that we know how to break the grip-hold of chronic food insecurity, as shown by China, Brazil, Ghana and many others. Why is it urgent? Because one out of seven people on earth today do not have enough food and recent volatility in global food markets remind us once again that we must remain vigilant.

We know that food and nutrition security cannot be achieved person by person or even nation by nation. Given its dependence on weather, water, technology, trade, and stability, it also requires concerted and cooperative global action. The new CFS is the only forum on earth which now includes the full range of stakeholders from civil society, nations, NGOs, the private sector, international financial institutions and a much broader participation by each of the Rome agencies and the full participation of the United Nations through the special representative of the Secretary-General. And critically, its mandate now covers the full spectrum of food security from agriculture to supporting smallholder farms, food markets to nutrition, food safety nets to emergency action to prevent famines and reach the most vulnerable of the world's hungry.

A special note here on nutrition. Powerful new evidence underscores that our goal must not solely be adequate kilocalories per person; micronutrients are key. Any revolution to end hunger is not complete without ending the scourge of undernutrition which permanently stunts the brains and bodies of millions of our fellow citizens. This is a preventable tragedy. And the CFS must be the centre of global action to end this scourge now.

This document is printed in limited numbers to minimize the environmental impact of FAO's processes and contribute to climate neutrality. Delegates and observers are kindly requested to bring their copies to meetings and to avoid asking for additional copies. Most CFS meeting documents are available on the Internet at www.fao.org/cfs. Delegates will be given an electronic copy of all documents on registration.

We have a truly world class panel of experts as part of the CFS under the leadership of Dr Swaminathan, one of my personal heroes. The CFS has now unrivalled access to information, to expertise and to the real-life experiences from the field. Taken together, the new CFS can be a major voice on the world stage to ensure that food security remains at the top of the global agenda.

The food crisis of 2008, which unleashed a global tsunami of increased hunger, was a wake-up call. With recent volatility, we are once again reminded that while we have done much to bring the world together in the CFS, in the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on Food Security, action by the G-8, the G-20, the African Union and many others and strong reinforced leadership of the World Bank, we have not yet fully adjusted our food systems to help buffer shocks and blows.

In addition to those just mentioned by Dr Diouf, I would like to suggest a few actions that I think are worthy of consideration by the CFS in preventing another surge in hunger and undernutrition.

First, we must ensure that all of our actions, from seeds to school feeding, to emergency action, address the issue of undernutrition, especially in the first thousand days from conception to two years old. The recent event in New York on the first thousand days, by Ireland, the United States of America, Uganda and the foreign ministers of many other countries, is the type of action that can help mobilize the attention we need.

Secondly, we need stronger protocols protecting the most vulnerable nations and people in tight and volatile markets. At the height of the food crisis an additional 140 million people were denied access to adequate nutrition and entire nations could not meet their food supply needs. I urgently call again for humanitarian food supplies to be exempted from export bans, reaffirming what was agreed to in the Rome World Food Summit's Food Security Declaration in 2009, and again stated in the L'Aquila Food Security Joint Statement at the G-8. This would ensure that the World Food Programme could provide a lifeline to people or the most vulnerable nations cut off from access to food. This could have a great stabilizing effect.

The Rome Declaration said: "We will remove food export restrictions or extraordinary taxes for food purchased for non-commercial humanitarian purposes, and will consult and notify in advance before imposing any such new restrictions." Enacted, this would send a powerful signal that we will no longer face another silent tsunami without a key tool to ensure effective emergency action. We call on the CFS and all nations to support enactment of this vital global action.

Disaster and weather insurance programmes can help spread the risk for disasters and provide ready-to-access funding to respond when they occur. I note the recent action by the African Union to consider a comprehensive approach to this.

We must stabilize the world's anti-hunger mechanisms to ensure greater predictability of funding and delivery in a crisis. Again I want to thank all the nations gathered here for support in the three years of profound reforms which have been called perhaps the most profound in decades, to the World Food Programme's methods of delivery. Today food assistance can now support fragile markets while saving lives.

We can also do much more to unleash the powerful link between food assistance and small farmers by scaling-up innovative tools such as Purchase for Progress.

We must consider a greater focus on women. It may be an over-statement to say "feed a woman and you feed the world," but not by much. There is a face to the 70 percent of small-scale agricultural production and it is the face of a woman. There is a face to hunger and it is the face of a woman. There is a face to inter-generational undernutrition and it is the face of a woman. And there is a face to some of the most powerful proven solutions empowering women to grow more, to connect to markets, to safely cook their food and to nutritionally feed their families. Women can and must help us win this battle.

In addition, scaling-up South-South cooperation, sharing recent powerful successes from Brazil to Mexico to India, Bangladesh, Viet Nam, the African Union's CAADP programme, Qatar's dry land initiative and beyond. And in fact this week the CFS will be presenting many country case studies

and learning from the experiences of countries, identifying best practices and areas to improve. This is critical and something the reformed CFS is in an unrivalled position to do.

In addition, the link with the private sector is key. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in New York last week, the Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved without partnership with the private sector and in no area is this more powerfully true than in food security.

We are witnessing a revolution in food security solutions at the country level. I see this every day. We have a strong toolbox to draw on, from FAO's storehouse of knowledge to IFAD's support for smallholder farmers, to a reformed food assistance mechanism in the World Food Programme's nutrition and safety net programmes like school feeding, cash and vouchers, Purchase for Progress, and connecting farmers to markets. And we have a global community of action, with innovative and strategic civil society and NGO partners that offer a wellspring of knowledge and support.

We must all work to ensure that the CFS seizes this opportunity and this week's strong agenda, to hear all sides, exchange views and most importantly provide concrete avenues for action by nations to beat hunger and malnutrition.

The reformed CFS should build on what we know works from our collaborative experience during the food crisis. We saw the power of working together, with the Secretary-General and Jacques Diouf's leadership during the food crisis, through David Nabarro and the High-Level Task Force on Food Security. United Nations country teams and regional organizations all have been mobilized to contribute to these efforts.

We saw nations stepping up to support our efforts, with unprecedented outpouring of support from many donors -- from the OECD nations to Saudi Arabia, to Malawi, to Thailand and beyond. I want to take this opportunity to thank the more than one hundred nations that stood in solidarity with the world's hungry during the 3 F's: the food, fuel and financial crises. Despite economic hard times, the world has prioritized reaching the most vulnerable, powerfully turning around rising hunger numbers. Today hunger is in retreat and again the world stood to make sure that happened -- and it worked. This response shows that working together we can make a huge difference, to cool off hot situations and to save lives.

This help in stabilizing nations and communities facing food crises will have lasting benefits. We know if a child under two is denied access to adequate nutrition, their brains and bodies will never recover. And we also know that a farmer who must sell off all their livestock and assets to feed their family in a crisis may not recover for decades.

As we gather, let us remember our most immediate challenges. Erratic food prices, storms, floods, earthquakes and conflicts have plunged millions in some of the nations gathered here into abject vulnerability just in the last eight months. With the devastating earthquake in Haiti, life threatening drought in Sahel and epic level flooding in Pakistan, we saw the washing away and the disruption of livelihoods and access to food to more than 50 million people in just those three situations alone.

The question before us is whether the CFS can be a powerful catalytic platform to support the world in scaling-up effective solutions in replicating successes and in rallying the world to support country-led strategies. Let us turn talk into concrete actions based on proven solutions, so every parent can have the dignity of feeding their family, every smallholder farmer can take pride in feeding their community, and every leader can be assured of providing sustenance for their people. This battle of achieving adequate food and nutrition for all is one we can - and must - win.

Thank you.