

Translation

Speech
by Federal President Horst Köhler
to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
on the occasion of World Food Day
Rome, 16 October 2007

Check against delivery

Mr Director-General,
President Kikwete,
Ladies and gentlemen,

A large part of humanity continues to live in extreme poverty. While the vast majority of us in the industrialized countries live in luxury, there are almost a billion people who do not have enough to subsist on, above all in Africa.

Poverty has two main causes: not being able to share sufficiently in globalization – mainly because of a lack of economic power and good governance – and being disadvantaged by states and private players who pursue their own interests with no regard for others. A development policy for the entire planet is needed if we want to sustainably improve things – a development policy that is judged by what it achieves for all humanity. Fashioning it is a huge challenge. And it is a challenge that will require exponentially increasing efforts as the global population grows from its current level of six and half billion people to the predicted more than nine billion people by the year 2050.

In our globalized world, the major issues facing mankind – securing peace, freedom, food for all, the right to development and the preservation of our environment – can only be solved by working together. But we can only work together if all sides treat each other with respect.

Hunger is not an inescapable destiny, but can of course be eliminated by wise policies. This requires first and foremost that the governments of the developing countries make food security for their populace a priority goal. All people have a right to healthy food, produced in a sustainable manner appropriate to their culture. Democratic participation by the people is the best guarantee that governments will genuinely understand people's basic needs and will take these into account. As the Indian Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has so aptly said, in countries where there are no elections and there is no opposition, governments do not need to worry about political fallout from their failure to eradicate poverty.

It is therefore good that the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has put democracy and good governance at the heart of its efforts to fight poverty. Good governance and a functioning executive are absolutely crucial for an economic policy that is geared to the needs of the people and will help to eradicate poverty. The industrialized countries should embrace the commitments made by the African countries within NEPAD as an offer of a new

brand of cooperation. But making pledges is not enough – they must also be fulfilled by both sides.

There is another point on which NEPAD has identified the right way forward. The vast majority of poor and starving people in the Southern hemisphere live in the countryside. NEPAD thus gives clear priority to rural and agricultural development. Notwithstanding the many successes of the "Green Revolution" in the 1960s, productivity in agriculture has remained far lower than it could be, especially in Africa, but also in parts of South Asia. Digging sticks and oxen-drawn ploughs reminiscent of Biblical times are still in use. And yet it would only take minimal technological improvements to generate better yields.

The paramount goal in the fight against hunger must be to ensure that people have an adequate supply of food from their own fields and the surrounding region. This requires a type of agriculture that is based on "ownership" in the developing countries and on functioning local structures and local know-how.

Far too often planners have focused their attention on ambitious industrialization strategies and huge prestige projects. But in rural areas in particular the conditions for sustainable management must be established step by step. Who can seriously expect a smallholder to invest his savings in his farm and machinery if he fears he may be thrown off the land at any time? How can farmers buy machinery and seeds if they have no access to loans? How can they sell their products if there are no roads and the existing tracks are impassable after rain?

Sound ways of addressing these issues do exist. We must use and refine these. The Peruvian economist Hernando De Soto has, for example, already emphasized the significance of property rights for economic development in his standard work, "The Other Path". Mohammed Yunus's Grameen Bank in Bangladesh is an illustration of how poverty can be effectively combated by providing microcredit. Such programmes have shown that farmers urgently need access to loans and savings accounts so that they can take the necessary business decisions by themselves. Encouraging farmers to form collectives and machinery syndicates based on the principle of mutual assistance is a way of helping them help themselves. Any rural development plan also has to provide for roads and transport links, storage facilities and the organization of markets. In rural areas, too, everything begins with education and training.

Unfortunately agricultural development in Southern countries has in the past taken many wrong turns. Europe, too, played its role in introducing monocultures of export crops across vast agricultural areas in the developing countries. For example, instead of planting manioc for their own use, farmers cultivated cocoa for the world market. It would be a grave error to repeat the mistakes of the past. Monocultures to produce biofuels are an inadequate response to the problem of climate change, especially if, for example, they exacerbate water problems in developing regions or cause prices for staples such as maize and wheat to rise dramatically. Bioenergy cannot be promoted at the expense of food security. But FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf has made a very interesting suggestion – bioenergy could be put to use to fight poverty directly. Instead of being used to propel cars, bioenergy could also be used in developing countries as a local energy source in rural areas.

Food aid will remain an indispensable humanitarian instrument. Sufficient food supplies must be delivered rapidly wherever they are needed. But emergency assistance must not become a problem in itself. Excessive long-term help from outside can stifle the recipients' initiative and frequently even results in aid-dependency. There are various horrific examples that can be cited. How often have we seen different organizations distributing foodstuffs and seed and fertilizers at the same time in the wake of a disaster? The food is eaten, but the fields remain untilled. Sadly many development organizations are still painfully slow at drawing any conclusions from this observation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Nor should food aid be a long-term method of offloading agricultural surpluses from the industrialized countries onto the developing countries. Nobody should be surprised if this approach destroys laboriously established local structures in developing countries and accelerates the exodus from the countryside. Enhanced regional cooperation between the countries of Africa has been agreed under the auspices of NEPAD. Why is more energy not being put into realizing this fine goal? It, too, offers a way of averting food crises and establishing African mutual assistance networks.

The fight against hunger must also encompass measures to prevent wars and conflicts. As a general rule, any war undoes several decades of development. Oxfam estimates that war costs the countries of Africa some 18 billion US dollars each year and an average of 15 % of economic growth. That is why it is so important that the African Union and NEPAD have clearly stated that preventing conflicts and preserving and restoring peace have precedence.

This is perhaps the most important contribution that can be made to preventing hunger. Unfortunately Africa and the international community still fail on this front all too often.

Prevention is better than cure. This truism also applies to climate protection. If climate change continues unabated, natural disasters such as droughts, plagues of vermin and floods, which are today exceptional occurrences, could become the norm. And yet we know that it is above all the industrialized nations which are accelerating climate change with their significantly higher greenhouse gas emissions. The industrialized countries therefore have a special responsibility in this sphere, too. I can't deny feeling a certain pride that the EU succeeded in setting binding targets on climate protection during the German Presidency. We want to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20 % in comparison with 1990 levels by 2020. But we know that this can only be done in concert, and that all sides have to acknowledge the problem and the need to take action. The industrialized states must dramatically reduce their emissions through improved technology and a change of lifestyle. And the emerging economies and developing countries have to find ways to improve living standards without their emissions increasing to match those of the industrialized nations today. The industrialized countries can help them in this endeavour, above all by facilitating access to the relevant technologies. Much can be done if we work together. The cost of timely action will be but a fraction of the cost incurred by waiting for the damage to occur.

Self-driven development, a better quality of life and defeating hunger are all closely linked to trade policy. The current framework for world trade was created chiefly by the industrialized countries. And there can be no doubt that many people around the world have profited from it. The beneficiaries include numerous former developing countries that today play an important role on the world markets. But the aim now must be to give all countries the opportunity to participate in world trade. These opportunities are still limited for many countries of the South. Our habit of subsidizing exports – especially agricultural exports – makes it harder for the developing countries to establish their own production bases and markets. For example, tinned tomato puree from the North is forcing tomatoes grown in Senegal from the markets. And how are stock farmers in Burkina Faso ever to get ahead if the milk produced by their cows is sidelined by imported powdered milk? And what about the fact that many countries' fishing rights are sold, especially in Africa, leaving the local fishermen literally empty handed?

We must at long last get down to the business of establishing a pro-development world trade order. In concrete terms, this means that the agricultural markets of the industrialized countries must be opened to imports from developing countries, and import duties on manu-

factured goods must be reduced, so that a manufacturing base can also be established in the developing countries. We need a world trade system that takes account of the special situation and needs of the developing countries. And last but not least, these countries' natural wealth must primarily come to benefit their own peoples.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is states that are responsible for setting customs duties and other conditions for foreign trade. But we must not forget that we as consumers decide what products to buy on a daily basis. I am very pleased to see that in Germany the turnover in fair trade products has increased by 50 % over the past year. When we buy these products, the farmers in the developing countries earn a little more than the world market price. Each and every one of us in the industrialized countries can help make the world a fairer place – by choosing well-sourced and well-priced goods.

To summarize, hunger is above all the result of political mistakes – in the developing countries as in the industrialized nations. To conquer hunger in our globalized world we need an honest, reliable and partnership-based development policy that spans the entire planet. It will have to establish the prerequisites for effective aid that promotes self-help and for sustainable food security in the South. These include a sound rural development policy, a fair world trade system, visibly greater efforts by the industrialized countries to protect the climate, as well as the prevention or resolution of wars and crises.

Few images are more compelling or eloquent than those of the growing numbers of young African men who make the dangerous journey across the sea to Europe in tiny boats to seek a future that offers something better than starvation and inescapable poverty. We have to grasp the fact that North and South are both in the same boat in the twenty-first century, and now form a community with a common destiny. For that reason we must also finally become a community which shares responsibility and learns together.

In order to balance the interests of industrialized nations, emerging economies and developing countries in a fair way that serves the global common good, we need first and foremost a strong and functioning United Nations. It is this organization that provides the natural and legitimate framework for this pan-global development policy. Let us therefore roll up our sleeves and press ahead with the reform process begun by Kofi Annan. At stake is the coherence and focus of the policies of the United Nations. The triad of development, security

and human rights must be viewed as a single whole and all political action must be aimed at implementing it as such. However this will only happen if the larger states in particular have the will and strength to forge a new, cooperative brand of world politics.

Much could be done simply by better coordinating the various United Nations institutions, thus making "delivering as one" more of a reality. And it is also high time for the work of the international financial organizations, the International Labour Organization and the World Trade Organization to be linked more closely with that of the United Nations.

You, ladies and gentlemen, have a particular responsibility to bring the ongoing process of reform in the FAO to its logical conclusion. The FAO should refocus on its core competences as a provider of information and political expertise. It is equally important for it to reform its decision-making and management structures, to ensure they have the full support of its governing bodies, staff and member nations. In short, the FAO must shape up so that it can play its rightful central role in combating hunger even more effectively. To this end, the FAO must further improve its cooperation with the World Food Programme and the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

The FAO Council has, with its Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food, laid the foundation for an honest policy in a spirit of partnership between North and South, between governments and their citizens. Now we have to devote our energies to putting these Guidelines into practice. Germany is counting on a strong FAO in the fight against hunger.