

ADDRESS BY MR. TOM HAYES, T.D. MINISTER OF STATE  
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ON THE OCCASION OF THE 39<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE FAO CONFERENCE  
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[Director General], Excellences, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be here today, to represent Ireland on the occasion of the 39th FAO Conference. At the outset, I wish to congratulate Director General Da Silva on his re-election. I wish him every success in his work to ensure the continual improvement of this Organisation. As he said following his election, 'there is always room for improvement'.

I am encouraged when I note that the number of hungry people has decreased in the time since I last addressed this Conference two years ago. In that space of time, the numbers of hungry people have reduced from 870 million to 795 million. This is good progress but it is not enough. We must redouble our efforts in developing the necessary political will and commitment to end this shameful reality especially when we consider that under-nutrition is the underlying cause in the deaths of 7000 children under the age of five that die every day.

It is a fact that the main concentration of extreme poverty and food insecurity is in rural areas. These are the very people who we should be enabling to provide food for growing populations. As former (Brazilian) President Lula said in his address to this Conference: 'these people are not the problem, they are part of the solution'.

More than one million Irish people died of starvation in Ireland in the 1840's. Our famine experience has played a significant role in shaping and defining who we are as a people

and how we engage with the world. We have supported FAO projects which promote resilience among the rural poor by supplying inputs such as seeds and livestock as well as training in smart farming techniques. We have also supported the FAO's SAVE FOOD initiative which is addressing the issue of food losses and waste.

We must not forget the role of the private sector. This was acknowledged in the political outcome document of the Second International Conference on Nutrition which took place here in the FAO last November. The work of that Conference is only just beginning. We must remain focussed on the targets and commitments which were agreed. The Scaling Up Nutrition movement is another important avenue where developing and developed countries can work together with the private sector to explore solutions to under nutrition. My Department has made available an Africa Agri-Food Development Fund to assist companies to invest in the development of sustainable agricultural production systems in Africa. We acknowledge that the private sector has an important part to play in ending hunger.

In addressing the theme of this debate, we must ask ourselves, what is the place of social protection policies in addressing rural poverty and hunger? There are obvious benefits to be gained from the FAO's work to determine advice for countries regarding the optimum policy mix of social protection and other measures to alleviate poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Production supports and sophisticated social protection measures can complement one another. It is undoubtedly within the FAO's mandate to build further knowledge in this area but it is important to have ongoing consultation with members to determine the precise focus of the FAO.

Finally, I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate all those countries who, last Sunday, celebrated the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We must continue our momentum to help every one of those countries still on the hunger map. Ireland has played an active role in negotiations to shape the post 2015

Sustainable Development Goals. This is a pivotal time in international development and it demands our full attention as the eradication of hunger and extreme poverty by 2030 emerge as possible goals. We must take into account the views of those people that are most impoverished and marginalised and ensure that their voices are heard.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Transformation is possible. Let us use the diversity of our experience to put forward innovative solutions and take leadership at every level. By doing so, we can improve the lives not just of this generation, but future generations to come.