

Statement of the Director-General at his Press Conference, Rome, 3 January 2012

Introduction

1. Ladies and Gentlemen, first of all, a Happy New Year! I welcome and thank you for coming to my first press conference as Director-General of FAO. As you know, I took up my duties on January 1st and yesterday was my first working day in FAO.
2. Right from the start I would like to emphasize the importance I attach to working in the most transparent and democratic way with Member Countries, with United Nations agencies – especially with WFP and IFAD, our sister organizations in Rome – other international and regional bodies, the private sector, civil society, academia, and scientific and research institutions.

Fight against hunger

3. Ending hunger requires the commitment of everyone: neither FAO nor any other agency or government will win this war alone. FAO is open to new ideas and approaches and to contributions from everyone.

4. I am convinced that we can regain lost ground and make progress towards the first Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living in hunger and extreme poverty by 2015. That also happens to be when my mandate ends, so there is no time to lose. We will start right away: FAO will scale up its support to a number of low-income, food deficit countries, especially those facing prolonged crises. This is an important step towards the complete eradication of hunger.

Relations with Member States

5. I also attach great importance to strengthening relations with FAO Member Countries. A few minutes ago, I met with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Regional Groups represented in FAO. We need to rebuild trust between the Secretariat and Member States to move forward, and I plan to do so by promoting a transparent and constructive relationship.

My first six months

6. I would also like to share with you some points of my agenda for these first six months. I look forward to exchanging ideas with small-scale farmer organizations, social movements and other civil society organizations

later this month during the World Social Forum, in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

7. I have also had contacts with private sector companies and foundations and many have expressed their interest in working together with us. I will continue these conversations in Davos, during the World Economic Forum.
8. Africa will be a priority during my mandate. I will travel to the continent at the end of January to take part in the African Union Summit and visit the Horn of Africa, to see the situation and the work being done there firsthand.
9. Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend all the events I have been invited to in these next months, but hopefully there will be new opportunities in the next few years.
10. I will also devote myself in coming months to preparing the FAO Regional Conferences taking place in the first semester and to reviewing the programme of work and budget, focusing on the five pillars that I presented to Member States during my election campaign: eradicate hunger; move towards more sustainable systems of food production and consumption; achieve greater fairness in the global management of food; complete FAO's reform

and decentralization; and expand South-South cooperation and other partnerships.

FAO reform

11. One of FAO's main challenges is to be more efficient and responsive. To do so, it must complete the reform process begun several years ago. I am committed to bringing the Organization's internal reform to a satisfactory conclusion and strengthening a culture of continuous improvement in FAO.

12. The reform process is advancing, but there is still much to be done. In my view, there is one crucial component where progress is seriously lagging behind – decentralization. In this connection, I attach great importance to the role of the Regional Conferences as an integral part of FAO governance. It is a way of bringing FAO closer to Member Countries and of promoting a bottom-up approach that will be extremely useful in the decentralization process.

13. Strengthening FAO's worldwide presence is the key to providing better services to governments in technical cooperation and policy assistance. I also see fieldwork as a necessary and important complement to our normative analysis. The two need to go hand-in-hand, mutually

energizing each other to make FAO a knowledge institution with its feet on the ground.

Budget and cost efficiency

14. During my mandate, I will also constantly look for additional ways of improving our efficiency, strengthening our technical work and reducing administrative costs.

15. This is a must in current times when many countries face difficult economic circumstances that might lead to reduced funding for development. Although we hope this will not happen, we need to be prepared and do our part. We are already working on it. We will cut excesses in our bureaucracy, look for ways we can make travel less costly, make better use of information technologies and cut special benefits for top management, including the Director-General.

16. The FAO Conference requested that we find efficiency savings in our 2012-2013 budget and we started this review process in the second semester of last year. I also intend to find additional savings to strengthen the Organization's decentralization process, so that we can improve our direct assistance to countries.

Años Internacionales

17. En esta ocasión, quisiera llamar la atención sobre la celebración de algunos años internacionales que han sido aprobados por la comunidad de naciones y en los cuales la FAO desea tener una participación destacada. Me refiero en primer lugar al Año Internacional del Cooperativismo que se celebrará en 2012. Este evento da un alto reconocimiento al sector del cooperativismo que juega un papel muy importante en la erradicación de la pobreza en todo el mundo. En segundo lugar, se conmemorará también el Año Internacional de la Quinua, que es un grano andino que se caracteriza por tener excelentes propiedades nutricionales, y gran capacidad de adaptación a condiciones climáticas adversas y una gran resistencia al estrés hídrico. Y en tercer lugar, quiero remarcar la celebración del Año Internacional de la Agricultura Familiar que se realizará en el 2014, en el que esperamos se hagan realidad muchas de las aspiraciones y demandas de las mujeres y hombres de campo, pastores, pescadores artesanales, comunidades indígenas, etc.

18. Es mi intención designar a Embajadores especiales que apoyen a la FAO en su tarea de dar relevancia a la celebración de estos Años Internacionales. Además, es mi intención abrir oficinas de enlace dentro de la sede de la FAO para los organizadores de estos importantes eventos internacionales.

19. Let me end my opening remarks by saying that it is going to be a tough road ahead, but it is a great privilege and honour to be able to work at FAO. I am honoured by this opportunity and convinced that the Organization can make a significant and growing contribution to food security and sustainable food production and consumption in the world.

20. I thank you for your attention, and I am ready to take your questions.