

As delivered

**FAO Director-General's Address at the World Food Day Ceremony**

**FAO Plenary Hall, Rome, 15 October 2010**

*Your Excellency Mr. Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda,  
The Honourable Mr. Vincenzo Scotti, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs of  
Italy,  
Your Eminence Monsignor Renato Volante, Permanent Observer of the  
Holy See to FAO,  
Honourable Ministers and Ambassadors,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

This year's celebration marks the 30<sup>th</sup> World Food Day, a day that has been consistently observed around the world over the last three decades. It was observed for the first time on 16 October 1981, following a UN General Assembly Resolution recognizing that food is a requisite for human survival and well-being and a fundamental human necessity.

Last month on the eve of the MDG Summit, FAO, jointly with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) released the latest hunger figures to show that 925 million people live in chronic hunger and malnutrition. While this represents a welcome decline from the 2009 level, it remains unacceptably high.

In addition, today 100 countries require emergency assistance to rebuild their agricultural productive capacity and there are 30 in a situation of food crisis. As a consequence the level of the FAO emergency assistance programme in these countries is now 1.1 billion US dollars involving 2000 experts and technicians.

The continuing high levels of hunger despite abundant global food supplies, better economic prospects and relatively lower food prices point to a deeper, more profound problem. In fact the present dramatic situation has come about because instead of tackling the structural causes of food

insecurity, the world neglected agriculture in development policies, resulting in an under-investment in the sector in particular in the developing countries.

Further to ensuring food security for the hungry today, food production will need to increase by 70 percent in the world and double in the developing countries in order to adequately feed a global population expected to reach 9.1 billion in 2050. Population growth will entirely occur in the developing world, where almost all of the undernourished people live. We have to resolutely reverse the long-term negative trend of the share of agriculture in official development assistance which dropped from 19 percent in 1980 to 3 percent in 2006 and now is at around 6 percent. Government of low-income food-deficit countries also should increase the share of agriculture in their national budgets from the present average level of around 5 percent to at least 10 percent.

Food production gains will need to be realized in the face of several emerging challenges. Urban areas will swell by 82 percent, or around 3 billion people, while rural population will shrink by 20 percent. This means a smaller rural workforce. Added to this is the increasing demand for agricultural feedstocks for biofuels whose production more than tripled between 2000 and 2008. Some 100 million tonnes of cereals are diverted from human consumption each year. There is also the impact of climate change on production, with more frequent and severe weather events.

Another threat to food security that calls for special attention is the increasing instability of food markets. Increased price volatility impacts directly on investment decisions and flows and falls heavily on poor consumers who spend 50 to 60 percent of their income on food. It also threatens political and social stability. Unilateral decisions by governments to restrict exports tend to aggravate the situation and can lead to increased speculation. There is a need for greater coherence and coordination in policy choices for greater assurance of unimpeded access to global supplies and improved confidence and transparency in market functioning. Effective tools and mechanisms to deal with food price volatility are urgently required.

We also need to guarantee food quality and safety for consumers. We need protection against pests and diseases of plants and animals. We

also need to have the capacity to effectively deal with emergency situations resulting from natural disasters.

The durable solution to the food insecurity problem lies in increasing agricultural production and productivity in developing countries and in strengthening their resilience capacity so they can produce the food needed and be more resistant to shocks.

FAO's work shows that the planet can feed itself, provided that concrete and targeted action is taken today to address the multifaceted and root causes of hunger. However, the goal should go beyond simple balances of global needs and supplies. The focus must be on small farmers in low-income food-deficit countries where the majority of the hungry lives and where the bulk of population growth will occur. Income generated by some 500 million small farmers of less than two hectares each supports the livelihood of about two-thirds of the three billion rural people in the world.

Increasing smallholder productivity requires better rural infrastructures, more roads, better access to quality inputs and better technologies for soil and water, improved credit and extension services, more machinery, more implements, as well as more skilled and better trained farmers.

We have the global resources, the technology and the know-how to ensure that every human being enjoys the right to food. Many countries around the world, in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America and the Caribbean, have realized remarkable progress in fighting hunger. This means that we know what should be done to defeat hunger.

We should build on past successes. FAO had earlier recognized the key role of Dr. Norman Borlaug, popularly known as the father of the Green Revolution, for his pioneering and innovative work in Mexico and later in India in the sixties which, with relevant investment in rural infrastructure and access to modern inputs, led to an unprecedented rise in food production and helped to prevent massive famine. His commitment, dedication and tireless efforts should always serve as a source of inspiration for us.

In fact, 50 percent of the increases in global crop yields achieved between 1965 and 2000 were due to improved plant genetics, and the remaining 50 percent due to improved water supply, fertilizers and better field crop management practices. Crop production can be increased in a sustainable way by making use of the right kind of policies, ensuring appropriate incentives and income for farmers, but also adopting the right kind of technologies and approaches. In a few minutes we will see a film on how that can come about.

Responding properly to the hunger problem requires urgent, resolute and concerted action by all relevant actors at all levels. It calls for the need for all of us to be united. Thus the theme for this year's World Food Day "United Against Hunger". It underlines that achieving food security is not the responsibility of one single party; it is the responsibility of all of us.

The renovated Committee on World Food Security constitutes a major effort in this direction. One key aspect of the reform of the Committee is to make it the most inclusive global food security forum for all stakeholders to work together. The participation of member nations, the UN system, civil society representatives, NGOs, farmers' organizations, the private sector, as well as international agricultural research centres and international and regional financial institutions offers an inclusive platform for policy convergence and the coordination of action and expertise in the fight against hunger.

Another good example of united efforts to end hunger that already involves over one million people around the globe is the "1 billion hungry" project – an international advocacy and awareness raising campaign, which, with the active participation of UN agencies, NGOs, youth groups, farmers' organizations, the private sector, our FAO Goodwill Ambassadors and other personalities, aims to bring pressure on political leaders to take urgent action against hunger and malnutrition.

But perhaps one of the most important achievements of united action is the defeat of the rinderpest disease. Today, I am very pleased to announce that we are at the end of the road to achieving the long-pursued goal of global rinderpest eradication. I can now announce that FAO is concluding its field operations and that we can expect to formally declare eradication by mid-2011 together with the World Organization for Animal

Health (OIE). This is the first time that an animal disease is being eradicated in the world and the second disease in human history after smallpox.

Rinderpest affected Africa, Asia and Europe for millennia and caused widespread famine and decimated millions of animals, both domestic and wild. In the period from 1980 to 1984 alone, the estimated direct losses in Africa resulting from the disease amounted to 500 million USD.

As the Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme, which was initiated in 1994, stands on the verge of achieving its goal to wipe out this devastating disease, allow me to recognize that the extraordinary success of this programme would not have been possible without the united efforts and strong commitment of the governments of all affected and exposed countries, without the African Union's Inter-African Bureau on Animal Resources and the responsible regional organizations in Asia and Europe, and without the donors' continuous support. I wish also to take this opportunity to thank all those individuals who have invested their time and professional lives into this highly significant effort.

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In the current context of difficulties and challenges, it is the shared responsibility of all actors to meet the needs of the hungry and poor and also the hopes of the founding fathers of this very Organization. Having 925 million of our fellow citizens suffering from hunger on a daily basis cannot leave us indifferent. It is outrageous. We have to join hands to realize our common goal of a food-secure world.

I am convinced that, united we can defeat hunger.

I thank you for your kind attention.