



International alliance against hunger



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2003 World Food Day
Bangkok, 16 October 2003

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2003 World Food Day/TeleFood theme

Each year on 16 October the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations celebrates World Food Day in commemoration of its founding on that day in 1945. The World Food Day/TeleFood theme for this year, International Alliance Against Hunger, is a call to action—to encourage all those concerned about the problem of hunger to join forces in a common effort.

Over the years, millions of people have graduated from the ranks of the hungry. But 840 million remain crippled by the indignity of not having enough to eat. The goal of cutting by half the number of hungry people by 2015—a target adopted at the World Food Summit in 1996 and reflected in the Millennium Development Goals—still lies out of reach.

What is lacking is political will. Many nations have made verbal commitments to fight hunger, but few have done enough and on the scale required. Nations will need to work harder to create the policy environment, provide the funding and implement the programmes to allow people to overcome hunger and poverty. For this reason, the global community has resolved to work together within an International Alliance Against Hunger.

An alliance brings together the strengths of different groups to gain greater power to achieve a common goal. The formation of such an alliance envisions all partners working in concert, from food producers and consumers to international organizations from private firms, scientists and academics to individuals, religious groups and non-governmental organizations. It also includes donors and policymakers from both rich and poor countries.



As this Alliance takes shape, leaders in an increasing number of countries are boldly putting the fight against hunger at the forefront of national priorities, realizing that only when people are well-fed can they take part in their nation's economic and social advancement. FAO applauds their courage and urges others to join them.

The Alliance does not foresee the creation of new mechanisms to fight hunger. Major conferences have galvanized support among governments and international organizations and set clear goals for the road ahead. And a wide range of development partners is using time-tested techniques to boost nutrition and income. Instead, the Alliance will strengthen political commitment for existing initiatives. At the same time it will help partners to develop a common vision on measures to take and build cooperation among diverse groups.

It will provide a forum for advocacy, promote joint actions by its members and facilitate information exchange—through web sites, newsletters and progress reports. Partners of the Alliance can offer assistance in their spheres of competence, which may include advocacy, technical training, policy advice and monitoring the progress of hunger reduction strategies. Together, these activities will help to attract increased funding from finance institutions, the private sector and other donors.

While everyone has a role to play in the Alliance, the main responsibility for reaching goals lies with a nation and its people. Each country should set its own national targets through its legislative bodies and lay out the steps to move forward, including implementing programmes that target the hungry.

The creation of an international Alliance is a pledge by all to work together to eliminate hunger. World Food Day and TeleFood activities around the globe will help to deliver this message while promoting the overall objective of this annual event: to raise awareness about the problems of hunger and to work towards long-term solutions to guarantee food for all.

In this time of ample world food production, it is unacceptable that more than 840 million people remain hungry. This year's World Food Day theme, International Alliance Against Hunger, will serve as a call for further action. Together, we must take the concept of a global partnership and make it a reality, with a view to guaranteeing the world's citizens a basic human right—to be free from hunger.



Address by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn

It is a great pleasure for me to join all of you again on the World Food Day at the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

For nearly six decades, FAO has provided important technical support and policy advice to countries in the Asia and the Pacific region in the fields of agricultural growth, rural development and food security. Its contributions are well known and recognized.

In recent decades, countries in the region have made considerable socio-economic progress and significantly reduced the proportion of undernourished population. However, statistically, 60 percent of the 840 million hungry people in the world live in Asia-Pacific countries. The region has adequate supplies of food to feed everybody, yet FAO statistics shows that one person out of every six in the region is undernourished. In this setting, the World Food Day theme for the year 2003 World Food Day, *Building an international alliance against hunger*, is of special significance to our region.

The problem is particularly acute in the case of children under five years and women, especially pregnant and nursing mothers. Many of them suffer from obvious signs of protein-energy and micronutrient deficiencies with

long term adverse implications for their own lives as well as for the economic well-being of their countries. Undernourished women give birth to underweight babies who are likely to remain poorly nourished throughout childhood. They can be at risk of having reduced mental and physical abilities. Such children growing up with inadequate nutrition during adolescence and into adulthood are likely to have low productivity and contribute to perpetuation of the vicious cycle of malnutrition and poverty.

Thailand's experience in dealing with the issue of food and nutrition security has always been based on the agricultural development for food production. Our national policy and strategy has always been in accordance with FAO's view in emphasizing the community participation and holistic approaches.

In addition to the Thai government supported projects, Thai civil society has for all time played an important role in the campaign against hunger and malnutrition; for example, an individual such as a successful farmer, or a group such as a successful farmer cooperative, lends a hand to the ones who need assistance. We also have foundations and non-governmental organizations that help funding the fight against hunger. The private sector, Thai companies and their employees now take much responsibilities in this effort.

The world now enters the age of globalization. In this context, international alliance is the key to peace and prosperity. International communities, that is to say, governments, international organizations, international corporates and even individuals act as responsible members of the global society. They contribute technology, resources, innovative ideas and modalities of implementation to the common goal such as the fight against hunger. To foster this partnership, the host country or community must play a part of a good coordinator and should state the requirements in logical and understandable project proposals. After being provided with the financial and other provisions, progress reports are considered necessary. These documents are not only important for monitoring an assessment of the projects but they serve also as the sources of initiative for other communities which are in the same situation.

I would like to mention that in my work as an NGO, I have received assistance from FAO on many occasions since 1990 and I would like to thank the Organization for that.

The main responsibility for commitment of resources and mobilization of action lies with the national actors with the support of concerted international advocacy and action. This approach was duly recognized by more than 170 governments represented at the World Food Summit: *five years later* in 2002 through their declaration entitled International Alliance Against Hunger, which called for an urgent need to reinforce efforts of all concerned partners for the fulfillment of the 1996 Summit goals. We must pursue this Declaration bearing in mind that, in this battle against hunger, we can and must win.

Lastly, I join you all in congratulating FAO on this auspicious day for its achievements and offer Thailand's good wishes and full hearted support to the World Food Day theme. I am confident that FAO will continue to receive similar support from other Asia-Pacific countries in realizing the collective mission of ensuring food security for all.



Message of the FAO Director-General



International alliance against hunger

Today, as people gather around the world to celebrate World Food Day, I would like to remind everyone of the paramount significance of this celebration; to rid the world of hunger.

For still 840 million people, around 800 million of them in developing countries, suffer from chronic hunger. This leaves us much too far from the World Food Summit goal set in 1996 to cut by half the number of hungry people by 2015.

Never before in the history of the world has so much food been produced. And we have technologies that can substantially increase farm productivity and ensure better water management.

But what is needed is the political will to tackle the underlying causes of hunger in all its manifestations. Nations must turn verbal commitments to fight hunger into practical programmes. In most developing countries, the majority of people live in rural areas and derive their livelihoods from agriculture. It therefore makes sense to invest in agriculture.

The international community, at the World Food Summit: five years later in June 2002, resolved to create an "International Alliance against Hunger".

This Alliance provides a forum for advocacy. It is also meant to promote joint actions by its members. And it encourages partners to offer assistance, whether training, policy advice, or help in developing hunger reduction strategies.

But we must never forget that the prime responsibility for reaching our goals lies with each government and its people: who must set their own national targets. I applaud the foresight of nations where leaders have made fighting hunger their top priority.

A group of NGOs has formed a coalition to campaign against hunger. Other alliances the world over are encouraging signs of the kind of energy and determination needed to eradicate hunger once and for all. In a growing number of countries, all sectors of society including food producers and consumers, international organizations, scientists, academics, religious groups, NGOs, donors, policymakers and individuals concerned about the problem of hunger, are joining together to fight against food insecurity.

So, on this World Food Day, I appeal to one and all to join the fight against hunger. The *International alliance against hunger* gives us a way to move forward together, to reduce poverty and to guarantee the most basic of human rights - to be free from hunger.



Statement by He Changchui,
Assistant Director-General
and Regional Representative
for Asia and the Pacific



On behalf of the Director-General of FAO Jacques Diouf, and on my own behalf, I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific for the commemoration of World Food Day 2003 which marks the 58th birthday of FAO.

This year's World Food Day theme, *International alliance against hunger*, is the call by heads of state and government from more than 170 countries assembled in Rome in June 2002 at the World Food Summit: *five years later*. On that occasion, they recalled the commitment to achieving food security for all and the immediate goal of halving the number of undernourished people by 2015 at the World Food Summit held in 1996. Moreover, alarmed by the painfully slow progress towards meeting the goal they themselves set, the leaders recognized the urgent need to reinforce the efforts of all concerned partners as an international alliance against hunger.

Perhaps I need not repeat the well accepted fact that the right to food is the most basic of human rights. By any reckoning, food appears very high in the hierarchy of human needs for survival and development. This message was loudly and clearly conveyed by world leaders in adopting the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger as the first and foremost Millennium Development Goal. This goal significantly groups together poverty and hunger for the simple reason that they are inseparably related and must be addressed together.

While the ugly face of urban poverty is seen in mega cities as well as in small towns of the Asia-Pacific region, poverty is mostly concentrated among agricultural households in rural areas. Urban poverty is to a large extent a byproduct of rural poverty. Marginal and small farmers and landless labourers unable to meet a minimum standard of living are forced to migrate to cities in the hope of finding jobs. Even youth from relatively well-off families with some education leave rural areas to seek greater opportunities and a better quality of life in the cities. While out-migration from the agricultural sector and rural areas is accepted by many as an expected result of economic growth, one needs

to be careful in drawing easy conclusions. One needs to look deeper at policy issues to see if inequities in the terms of trade, underinvestment in the agriculture and rural sector, and other policy biases are forcing the rural poor to the cities. Furthermore, we should contemplate whether it is despair that drives these people to leave the only place they have ever known.

In this context, World Food Day is an occasion to remember that in the Asia-Pacific countries, agriculture and rural development has been the foundation for non-agricultural growth. The great cities of Asia were founded and can be sustained only by strong rural economies. Thus this is an occasion to be conscious of the realities of rural life and the hard struggle for livelihood that many rural people are condemned to.

The idea of the *International alliance against hunger* is firmly based on the great potential of the multitude of stakeholders in working together to wipe out the scourge of hunger from our midst. Mobilization of such an alliance is possible because it is in everybody's interest. What it calls for is the recognition of the problem by the stakeholders and the awareness amongst them that their collective and individual actions can be directed at eradicating hunger without sacrificing their own objectives.

Working for an international alliance against hunger requires governments to mobilize political will and work harder to create the policy environment, provide the funding, and implement the programmes to allow people to overcome hunger and poverty. They must place the millennium development goal for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger at the center of their development strategy and take a leading role in forging an alliance of different groups, including food producers and consumers, international organizations, governments, agribusinesses, scientists, academics, private individuals, policy makers, religious groups and non-governmental organizations.

This alliance should evolve into viable partnerships between the government, private sector, NGOs, civil society, academic institutions and the country's development partners towards concrete actions. Among the development partners, the developed countries must fulfill their commitments to provide greater market access to agricultural products from developing countries as agreed in Doha and ensure a greater flow of resources, as assured in Monterrey. Let us hope that the failure in Cancun to reach a consensus among nations was only a temporary setback and the hopes for free and fair trade are not lost for ever. This is the hope we must embrace as this great country, which hosts the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, is hosting the summit of world leaders under the APEC forum.

On this solemn occasion, we are confident that the APEC leaders are fully conscious of their responsibilities towards the plight of the poor and the hungry and will take decisions that will contribute to the alleviation of their suffering.

From our side, the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific is initiating activities to promote a regional alliance against hunger. Tomorrow, a high-level roundtable meeting of stakeholders from the region will be held at the FAO office in Bangkok. Nine eminent personalities from Asia and the Pacific will provide intellectual inputs and policy perspectives on the regional alliance, and deliberate on effective means of cooperation and follow-up activities. The roundtable participants serve as the regional nucleus to develop a strong multi-stakeholder partnership network across countries rallying around

the common cause of the eradication of hunger.

We are honoured today by the presence of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. We extend our profound gratitude to Your Royal Highness, our Guest of Honour, for providing inspiration in her commitment to and leadership in fighting hunger and undernutrition, particularly among women and children. In this connection, FAO is privileged to cooperate in the *Agriculture for school lunch programme* - an initiative of Her Royal Highness - aimed at providing schoolchildren with knowledge about agriculture and at the same time producing food for school meals to help reduce malnutrition in remote areas in Thailand.

Hunger and malnutrition inhibit children's growth and reduce their capacity to learn. As a result, too many children die before adulthood or become adults without the capacity to reach their full potential. Too many nations are stalled on the road to development. In this time of ample food production it is unacceptable that more than 500 million people remain hungry in Asia and the Pacific. FAO is calling for action - encouraging all those concerned to join forces by working for an international alliance against hunger.



Statement by Kim Hak-Su,
UN Under Secretary-General
and Executive Secretary of
ESCAP



It is indeed an honour for me to address this World Food Day Celebration. At the World Food Summit in 1996 and at the Millennium Summit in 2000, world leaders made a commitment to halve the number of people living in absolute poverty and hunger by 2015. In Asia and Pacific today, over five-hundred-million people are undernourished and are unable to live healthy and active lives. Reducing hunger will also significantly contribute to addressing other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), by reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, reducing the risk of infectious diseases and extending the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Countries of Asia and the Pacific have made faster progress than other parts of the developing world in reducing poverty and hunger. The most spectacular successes come from South East Asia and East Asia. China, for example, almost halved the number of people living with hunger in the decade of the 1990s.

However, as a region, Asia-Pacific's success still falls far short of the rate needed to achieve the target by 2015. This is particularly true for South Asia, where countries like India and Nepal have seen a net increase of people living with hunger in terms of absolute numbers.

While fighting hunger we must also take into account that some current strategies for improving agricultural productivity endanger sustainable growth. Our policy interventions must seek to protect the environment while increasing agricultural productivity.

Moreover, market penetration and introduction of new technologies in communities that predominantly rely on subsistence agriculture, may lead to restructuring and consolidation of agricultural production and may make many farmers redundant. Alternative strategies for rural development need to be studied and introduced, including off-farm employment, development of rural centres and linking rural areas to small towns and medium sized cities.

We must empower the poor by strengthening food security and increasing physical, economic, social and political access to markets, services and forums of decision-making. We must also recognize that in many countries women are particularly vulnerable to hunger and poverty and work towards reducing these disparities. In other words we must design and implement pro-poor and gender-aware development policies.

On the occasion of the Twenty-third World Food Day Celebration, I urge you to reaffirm your political commitment to work even harder to create the policy environment, provide the funding and implement the programmes to empower the poor to overcome hunger and poverty. UNESCAP remains committed to foster regional cooperation and assisting its members in building their capacities to achieve the MDGs, particularly those related to reducing hunger and poverty. As some of you are aware UNESCAP underwent a process of reform that seeks to make its assistance more targeted. Under the overarching goal of assisting countries in achieving the MDGs, UNESCAP's work now focuses around three themes: reducing poverty, managing globalization and addressing emerging social issues.

Together with the United Nations Development Programme, UNESCAP is involved in monitoring the progress in achieving the MDGs in Asia and the Pacific. The initiative also focuses on analyzing successful policies used by member countries in achieving the MDGs and transferring these lessons to other countries. We have also initiated flagship technical cooperation projects that seek to collect and transfer best practices in rural development, promoting more productive rural-urban linkages and in providing access to markets and economic and social services to the poor. We will continue to work with countries of the region, in close cooperation with FAO and other agencies within and outside the United Nations family to assist you in enabling the poor to overcome hunger and poverty.