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Food and Agriculture
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Unies pour l'alimentation
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Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las
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Alimentación y la Agricultura

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CONFERENCE

Thirty-ninth Session

Rome, 6-13 June 2015

Statement of the Director-General

His Excellency the Prime Minister of Fiji,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome all of you to FAO as your *re-elected* Director-General.

First of all, I would like to begin by acknowledging and thanking you for the massive turnout at this session.

We have almost 1700 participants registered. 191 Member delegations. This is a record. Including all Pacific Islands that are FAO members – this is the first time they all attend our Conference.

We also have 15 Heads of State and Government present this week, most of them attended yesterday's award ceremony.

Today, we will have the speeches of the Prime Minister of Fiji and the President Fernandez of Argentina will also be with us later. On Saturday, President Peña Nieto of Mexico will join the Conference.

And on Friday, Queen Letizia of Spain will be nominated as our Special Ambassador for Nutrition.

All these are record numbers for a FAO Conference. And so are the 177 votes that I received in my re-election.

I thank you for showing confidence in the Organization under my leadership.

You have given me a clear mandate to lead FAO in my second term, pressing on the path that we charted together.

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I want to thank you for your support. I want to thank you for your trust.

I promise to you that I will do my best to do more and better to help you advance towards the sustainable and food secure future we want.

In this spirit, allow me, then, to report to you some of the key elements of what we have started, and still need to do together.

Our global challenge remains ending hunger and malnutrition. And soon, this will also be one of the Sustainable Development Goals.

FAO needs to be able to make a significant contribution to that goal. The transformational change I have led in FAO strengthens that capacity.

At the 2013 Session of Conference, we took important steps in the right direction.

We elevated our first global goal from *reduce* to *eradicate* hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

We also sharpened the focus of our work around five strategic objectives.

These priorities now bring our Regular Program and extra-budgetary work together. They guide our partnerships within and outside the UN system, including with regional organizations and non-state actors.

This is the culture change in the FAO way of working that you have been asking for.

We are responding to national and regional needs by strengthening our presence in the field. Since 2012, we increased by 16 percent the professional staff serving in decentralized offices without weakening our technical capacity at Headquarters.

Funding allocation to the field also went up, from 36 to 42 percent of our total regular program budget. *This is what decentralization is about, but there is still much more to do.*

This stronger presence is tailored to specific needs of each region and was accomplished without weakening our global technical capacity. *This is being a knowledge organization with its feet on the ground.*

We are adopting a results-based management approach that is giving positive returns. Overall, we have over 80 percent of progress towards the outcomes defined in the current Program of Work.

Six side events this week will showcase some of the results we have achieved so far through our regional initiatives. I invite you to attend them to see how FAO is working on the ground.

Let me also add that the transformation of FAO into an Organization fit for the 21st Century has not been easy. It takes place under considerable financial constraints.

Over the past three years we achieved an unprecedented 108 million dollars in savings. We transformed difficulty into opportunity. We used the need to operate with tighter financing as a driver for greater efficiency.

We streamlined processes. We integrated our administrative work through technological solutions such as the Global Resource Management System (GRMS). We pursued cost-reducing joint initiatives with the Rome-based agencies. *This is the best value for money that you asked for.*

But you are still asking me to do more. More and more.

This situation is not exclusive to FAO. You yourselves have made in your countries the cuts you are asking of us now.

But there are two big differences.

First, as you all know, most of decisions related to staff costs, which represent around 75 percent of our budget, are decided in New York, at the United Nations, and not in Rome, at FAO.

And, second, in the case of FAO, our financial constraints have been lasting for over 20 years. Since the 1994-95 biennium, our budget has fallen by over 25 percent in real terms. This is a big cut.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are now starting to see the first benefits of the strategic transformation we have undergone, to help you achieve the concrete results we all want.

The side events this week, as I said, will give an overview of results we have already achieved on the ground.

This Conference, and the Program of Work and Budget that you will discuss this week, build on these efforts.

The revised budget we are requesting to deliver the proposed Program of Work is of 1.036 million dollars.

This is the budget-level agreed on at the last Council session. I am confident that Conference will endorse this recommendation.

I would like to highlight that this is the first time we enter Conference with consensus on the level of the budget.

This historic feat is another sign of the strength of our Organization and of how we are finding common ground that allows us to move forward.

The PWB you have before you is the extension of the priority setting process we began in 2012.

It maintains the focus on the five strategic objectives, and proposes added emphasis on nutrition and climate change.

Raising levels of nutrition was one of the reasons that FAO was created for seventy years ago. It is at the heart of our mandate.

Last year's Second International Conference on Nutrition, co-hosted by FAO and the WHO, called on FAO to take on a greater role in improving nutrition, working closely with other UN agencies and relevant actors.

We are responding to this. Adequate nutrition is the complement to food security. We need both. Quantity and quality needs to come together when we speak about food.

And it is worth noting that while global undernourishment numbers are falling, obesity is going up.

It is a problem for developed but also for developing nations, for poor families and rich families, and it is a problem especially in middle-income countries.

Climate change is the second area we are proposing for greater attention in the next biennium.

It has a direct impact on food security and agriculture, as you all know.

It affects all countries, especially the drylands in which the majority of the world's poor and hungry people live in.

And climate change puts at risk the very existence of some Small Island Developing States, as the Kiribati delegate reminded me yesterday.

He approached me after the award ceremony, thanking me for the recognition and said he hoped to have a wall to hang the diploma on for many years to come.

As you know, Kiribati is only a few meters above sea level, and the sea level is increasing rapidly.

As we celebrate World Oceans Day today, let me remind you that they are also vulnerable to climate change.

It is not only that sea levels and temperatures are rising. Oceans are also becoming more acidic as they absorb more carbon dioxide. Marine ecosystems are degrading. If this continues unchecked, it will have devastating consequences.

That is why one of our global actions is the Blue Growth Initiative, that proposes to integrate fisheries and sustainable environmental management in coastal areas and oceans.

There is no time for pessimism with climate change. It is time for action. And FAO will do its part.

Our primary concern is to help developing countries, including the SIDS, to adapt to climate change. I want to add that agriculture, including fisheries, aquaculture and forestry, also has the potential to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

With the right policies, we can increase food security, adapt and mitigate.

But this will require a paradigm shift from the dominant input intensive approach to more sustainable and resilient food systems.

This change has a cost. And it is a cost that poor farmers, fisherfolk and indigenous communities, especially in developing countries, cannot pay alone. They need your support.

We already set up a trust fund to support SIDS, to which I urge you to contribute to.

In fact, we have also set up the Action for Nutrition Trust Fund. As we tighten our regular program budget, an increase in voluntary contributions to scale up our efforts in these two areas is needed.

Big or small, all your contributions are very welcome.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yesterday we recognized 72 countries that have made significant progress against hunger.

Each one has different experiences, but some common elements stand out in their stories. Among them: political will, inclusive economic growth, family farming, and social protection.

Social protection is the theme of this Conference.

You certainly remember what former President of Brazil Lula da Silva told us on Saturday at the McDougall Lecture.

Today, around 150 million people are able to stay above the poverty line thanks to social protection programs. They are essential for responding to the main cause of hunger today: insufficient access to food.

But we cannot rely only on social protection to end hunger or extreme poverty. It must be part of wider action that includes productive support, health, education, and much more.

And, ideally, we should find ways to bring these elements together to create virtuous cycles of local development.

As President Lula reminded us, giving cash transfers to the woman of the family empowers them and helps ensure a more responsible use of the income.

With money in their hands, families can buy food locally, stimulating family farming. And family farming can provide healthy school meals for children.

These are the kind of multiple win situations we must look for.

Let me also highlight that there is an urgent need to act.

We can – and we need to – do more and better. We can – and we need to – speed up and scale up our responses.

And we need to do it now because, despite all our progress, there are still nearly 800 million hungry people in the world. And just as adapting to climate change can't wait, the hungry cannot wait either!

FAO is ready to increase its support to all the nations that make the political commitment to strengthen efforts against hunger and malnutrition.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2015 marks the 70th anniversary of our Organization. In our first seven decades, we gave a great contribution to increasing food production. Today, our contribution needs to be to end hunger.

You have already made this bold commitment at FAO. And ending hunger and malnutrition will be adopted as the Sustainable Development Goal number two later this year.

Achieving it is within our reach, if we work together and transform our words of commitment into concrete action.

We can be the generation to end hunger and malnutrition. That is my priority: food and nutrition security for all.

Thank you for your trust, thank you for your support, and thank you for your attention.