

Food  
and  
Agriculture  
Organization  
of  
the  
United  
Nations

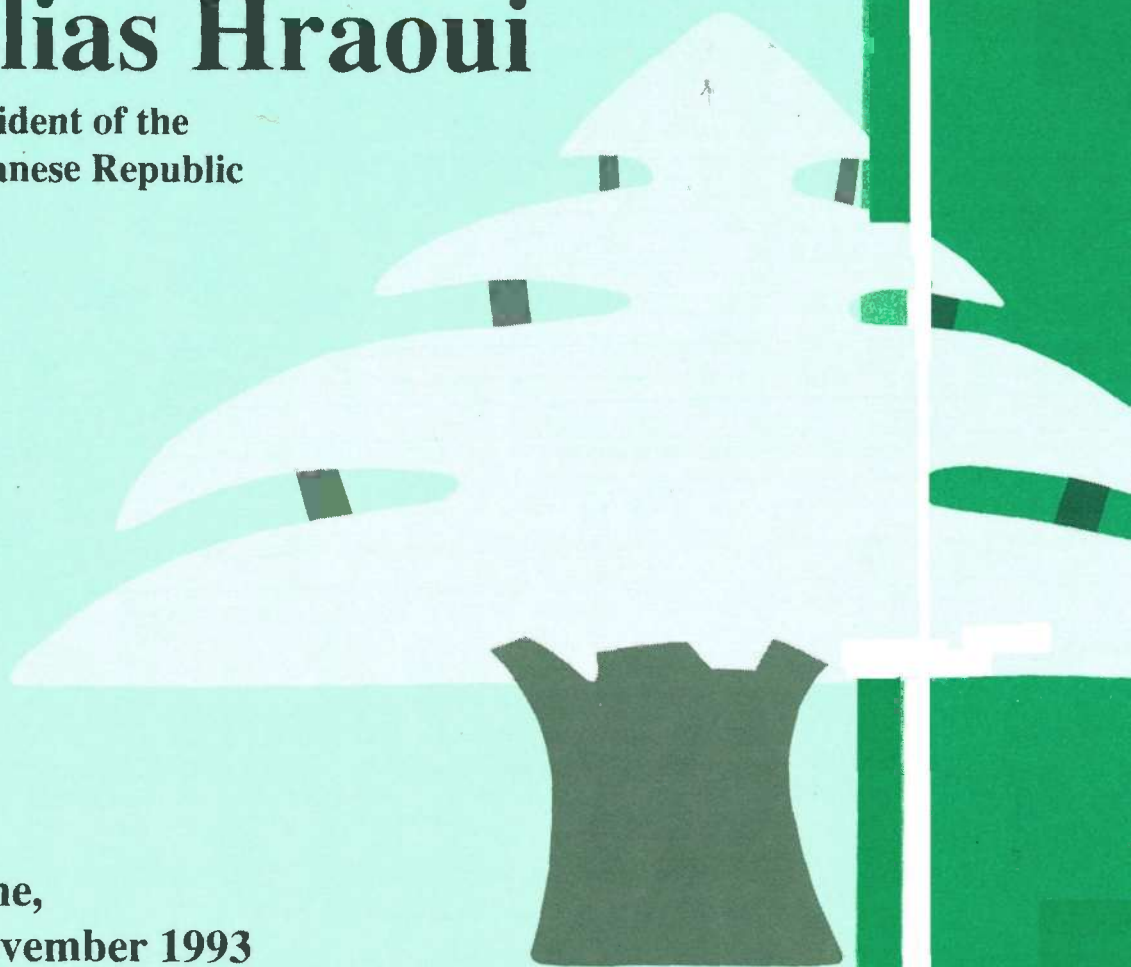


## 18th McDOUGALL MEMORIAL LECTURE

# Elias Hraoui

President of the  
Lebanese Republic

Rome,  
6 november 1993



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**International cooperation without  
conflict: the universal key  
to progress in agriculture**

Mr Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Mr Director-General,  
Distinguished Delegates,

*I should like to begin with my own country, Lebanon, which has only just emerged from a period of devastating turmoil and suffering, and to echo here today the joy of my people at its rebirth and renewal. I was extremely pleased to accept the invitation of my old friend, Edouard Saouma, the Director-General of FAO, whose endeavours and versatile personality have stamped so indelibly the history of this Organization in its never-ending efforts to help us to cultivate the earth and to feed its children, and to foster a dialogue between the developed and the developing countries.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, you constitute the World Assembly of those responsible for food and agriculture and the best possible prefiguration of a world government that stands against hunger and for the sustainable stewardship of the agricultural, fishery and forestry resources of our*

*earth. I am here today to voice the thoughts and aspirations of a man of the countryside, born and bred in rural Lebanon, the heartland of the Arab world and the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, where the civilizations, religions and eternal values of the peoples of these three continents still mingle today.*

**HUMANITY, ONCE UNIVERSALLY RURAL,  
CHANGES BEFORE OUR EYES**

*Mr Chairman, we all have our roots in the countryside, whether first-hand or through our parents and grandparents. However, the world has opted to change at a pace and on a scale unknown since people first grew crops and domesticated animals. This upheaval is already seriously affecting our lives, although it has its destructive as well as its creative side. Thus we need to understand, to control and to tame its unruly ways and to make sure that both we and our earth reap the benefits of progress without losing our souls or sacrificing this life-giving natural world in the process.*

**THE RURAL WORLD OF YESTERDAY**

*I have known villages where the year's work was measured by the seasons and the day's work by the angle of the sun, where the call to prayer or the chime of the church bell told farmers when to pause from their*

*labours and when to eat; where it was possible to tell where people came from by the colour and pattern of the women's clothes, not by the number plates on their cars.*

*I loved those villages where the human dimension in the community – a group of elders, the feast days enjoyed by all – was readily apparent, where a father's trade was learnt by his sons and a mother's knowledge was passed on to her daughters, and where the full array of skills – blacksmith, musician, barber, tailor, storyteller, miller – could be found within the family and village.*

*I am not saying, however, that all was milk and honey. I know that, in those times, the ship of knowledge sailed on a sea of ignorance and that, in the balance between humankind and the environment, the great levellers were disease and death.*

*I also know that the rudimentary tools of the time required back-breaking labour in return for a pittance and that, for the worker in the field, the prevailing socio-economic systems and the feudal regimes were more a source of oppressive taxation than of peace and happiness.*

*We know this; we know what we owe to science, on the one hand, and to democracy, on the other. But I wanted to evoke the rich tapestry of the past so as to highlight better the importance of the struggle to preserve or to reattain a legacy threatened by the headlong pace of modern life.*

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## THE STRENGTHS AND DRAWBACKS OF PROGRESS

*We need to assess the outcome and the manifold implications of this evolution of which we are all part.*

*We have unearthed and unleashed the energy of fossils and of the atom, but we are only now beginning to assess the gravity of the pollution and waste materials that can poison nature and ruin our lives.*

*We have developed a system of communications that can reach into millions of homes at the same moment, but we are unable to protect our children and our peoples from ill-considered or manipulated media assertions, or from the mindless and degrading entertainment that is all too often foisted on us to boost audience figures and advertising income at the expense of our education and cultural enrichment.*

*We have discovered the magic of computers and have given wonderful machines many jobs to perform, but we have no idea what to do with the millions of workers who lose their jobs each year to the rationalization of production.*

*We have spread industrial practices into every sphere, but uniformity and standardization are gaining ground, destroying the heritage and cultures of civilizations rich in diversity and erasing the individuality and even the identity of the world's peoples.*

*We may admire the industrial revolution, but let us beware of its negative spin-offs. Awe and dread of mechanization come at a high price,*



*as witnessed by the means people use to regain their lost identities: drugs, violence, intolerance and fanaticism.*

*We may well admire the scientific revolution and its achievements. Our scientists and doctors have accomplished miracles; they have found ways of protecting life against hitherto fatal diseases and of alleviating intolerable suffering, but they have also learned how to manipulate the human gene. Who is now going to regulate the use of this knowledge and to spare us from the monstrous consequences, intentional or unintentional, implicit in this new power?*

*Let us respect technological progress, therefore, but not allow galloping technology to plunge the world into such a frenzy of consumerism as to endanger rather than to protect our natural resource base. Nor is a widening gap between developed and developing societies permissible, for the degradation of the latter would be disastrous for us all.*

#### **THE HUMAN BEING: FOCUS AND ULTIMATE GOAL OF DEVELOPMENT**

*We do not wish to sacrifice what we "are" for what we can "do". The human being must always be at the heart of our actions.*

*The human being – this means both man and woman. Woman – after God – is the bearer of life, the bringer of peace, the provider of our children's needs, food and education, and the custodian of their future.*

*We are all aware of the admirable strides that women have made in the realms of politics, the arts, literature, science and the social services since they began to make progress towards recovering their rights.*

*We have attained unprecedented heights of exactitude in our calculations of national product, balance of payments, yields and productivity. Unquestionably, we need to tackle economic problems, for these have a great bearing on our lives. The economy, though, is but one essential ingredient of human development, so let us make sure that the economic whole is not deprived of its social and political parts.*

*Let us, therefore, take special care to guarantee the respect and rights of individuals who are the core of society, for the human being is both the most valuable means and the ultimate goal of all human actions.*

#### **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: GLOBAL PROBLEMS REQUIRE MORE EFFECTIVE COOPERATION**

*While governments must ensure that there are well-being and harmony among their own peoples, they also have to manage relations between peoples. As we grow increasingly aware that the challenges before us are universal and that no state is able to face them alone outside a global framework of international cooperation, these relations take on a new dimension. This was made abundantly clear at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro.*

*Let me mention just a few of these challenges: the fight against hunger, international migration, global warming and its worrying implications, desertification, deforestation, national and transboundary pollution, biodiversity, the exploitation of marine resources, the control of narcotics and the resorption of major endemic disease.*

*On the one hand, human activity is now so intense and so cumulative that its consequences overspill national boundaries and affect the world's global balances. On the other, relations between peoples and continents have grown and multiplied into such a web of interdependence that the major economic entities now question their ability to maintain control over their own destinies.*

*Although we are still at the teething stage in international cooperation and global management, we no longer have to decide whether or not cooperation is useful or necessary, but rather how it is to be achieved. Exchanges between the peoples of Europe, Asia, Africa and America are now much more intensive, frequent and decisive than under the great empires of the past. We therefore have to find new forms of coordination and cooperation and to craft a balanced relationship in which each state sees its individuality, sovereignty and independence respected while, at the time, accepting the duties and constraints of living or, perhaps I should say, surviving together with other states.*

**INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

*Yet, if we take an honest look at the state of relations between peoples and nations, we can see what an immense effort still lies before us in rising to this challenge. Movements of people, capital and goods are all contentious areas that need our full cooperation if solutions are to be found.*

*Whereas the mingling and blending of cultures and ethnic groups has been a wellspring of civilization and progress, isolation has led only to stagnation, if not regression. History shows us, however, that the process of assimilation has rarely been peaceful.*

*With mutual respect, therefore, we must find ways to deal with the complexities of the human imbalance, by which I mean prosperity on the one hand and want on the other, with all the attendant problems of this imbalance.*

**DEVELOPMENT AID**

*It is often said these days that if the flow of migration is too great for the wealthier countries to absorb, then the need to migrate could be lessened by improving matters in the poorer countries: capital flowing in one direction or people in the other, so to speak. Of course there is nothing new in this, and emigrants would much rather that they could afford to stay on their own soil than brave the perils and heartbreaks of departure to an unknown land. But the situation in this respect is one of real*

*pathos, in that we have countries burdened with debt, investment at an all-time low and financial flows reversed from the South to the North. You, of course, know all this.*

*The recent Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro reviewed the action needed to achieve genuine sustainable development, showing what such development entailed and how urgently it was required. This conference aroused an unprecedented level of awareness but, at the final hurdle, when the time came to calculate the costs, it was unable to face the price to be paid.*

*It is not surprising that some people have been disillusioned by the disappointing results of development aid, but we remain confident that the hopes we have invested will soon bear fruit. I do not want, though, at this point to go into the criticisms that have been levelled at certain misuses of development aid, the amounts of aid, or how aid is apportioned, although aid unquestionably still falls short of the set target of 0.7 percent of the wealthier countries' gross national product.*

*Nor do I wish to dwell on the spread of destructive weapons or on the enormous sums involved in their trade, although I detect a haunting parallel between the arms trade and drug trafficking, both of which thrive on misery and death. Having mentioned arms, however, I feel compelled to affirm from the reaches of this international tribune that Lebanon and its Arab brothers are working for a genuine and meaningful peace that will allow people to return to their land, a lasting peace sanctioned by the*

*total elimination of the weapons of destruction. No war can possibly offer what such coveted peace promises. Our region must set the example and build this peace so that the whole world, starting with the Middle East, can finally concentrate on progress in the knowledge that all its peoples are secure:*

*International agencies and financing institutions such as the regional development banks, IFAD, the World Food Programme and, particularly, the World Bank have an incalculable advantage in that their contribution to economic and social progress is multilateral, which gives them the wide audience their competence so fully deserves. Their authority and power to intervene grew increasingly during the 1980s, so it is all the more important that they temper their expertise with modesty and that they remain absolutely free from outside interference.*

*Prescriptions for economic adjustment and stability are similar to doctors' orders in that poor progress cannot be solely attributed to the patient's lack of cooperation. Doctors know very well that they have to listen to their patients, for their science is without meaning if they ignore the sick to treat the sickness alone.*

#### **COMMODITY MARKETS**

*There is certainly room for concern when we consider the ineffectiveness of international cooperation at the level of trade and commodity markets.*

*We all agree that what we need is trade, not aid, but what form of trade? Dominated by a handful of transnational companies – either directly through market influence or indirectly through pressure on governments – international trade in areas of vital interest to the South, particularly agricultural exporting countries, has in fact been a barrier to development. The fall in market prices, for example, has caused far greater losses in revenue for many developing countries than what they can hope to gain from aid.*

*For how much longer can we accept this situation? The G7 summit in Toronto went so far as to state in its conclusions that higher raw material prices would have a dangerous inflationary effect on the industrialized countries! Are we to deduce from this that the rich require the poor to remain poor? The endless GATT negotiations are currently being presented as the last chance to reverse the downward spiral of the industrial economies. While we may accept this, let us not hoodwink ourselves as to the benefits for the poor countries.*

*Nevertheless, we do have the example of the Stabilization System for Export Earnings (STABEX), developed by the European Economic Community within the framework of its agreements with the ACP countries, which proves that alternatives do exist. The extension of such provisions to other countries and other commodities and the introduction of equitable and mutually supportive financial and trade mechanisms*

*are issues that urgently need to be placed on the agenda of economic cooperation.*

Mr Chairman,

#### **THE ARAB COUNTRIES**

*Having reviewed some of the international themes, I should like to return with you to the Arab family of my roots, whose language rings from this tribune for the first time in the history of the McDougall Memorial Lectures. I find it quite striking to note how closely and urgently the matters that I raised in a global context also apply to our community.*

*An important feature of our region's recent past has been the national takeover of its oil resources. The emergence of this source of income enabled many of the region's countries, which were overwhelmingly poor in the early 1960s, to embark on a spectacularly successful process of development and modernization.*

*The distribution of human and material resources on the ground has meant that millions of farmers, workers, teachers and technicians in the Arab world have migrated to those countries where additional muscle and brain were required to develop the natural resources, to build the infrastructure and to give life to new services. However, the political vicissitudes and wars that have so painfully affected our region and my*



*own country, Lebanon, have dealt harsh blows to these emigrant populations.*

*The Middle East is a region seething with population movement. In some countries, up to one-third or more of the workforce is from abroad while, in others, hundreds of thousands of returnees are having to be accommodated, and entire rural sectors have been drained of their enterprising youth who have left to seek a more attractive future elsewhere.*

*As soon as they could, the better-endowed countries in the region mobilized to help the least-favoured countries. Arab contributions in support of development objectives have fostered an unparalleled burst of activity in all spheres of Arab development. Intercountry agreements and practical measures have also fostered progress in commodity trade through enhanced and reciprocal market access, although progress has unfortunately been undermined at times by military and political instability.*

#### **AGRICULTURAL PROGRESS AND THE HARNESSING OF WATER**

*Though our regional population has doubled, the food situation has improved considerably. Agricultural progress in the Arab world has been amazing, although much undoubtedly remains to be done. Agricultural output is currently double what it was 30 years ago, and there have been outstanding successes; Saudi Arabia, for example, now exports wheat.*

*Except for a handful of countries, our arable land resources are few and poor. Progress has come at the high price of hard work and much sacrifice. Our food imports are growing almost three times faster than agricultural production, so we must be more careful than ever to ensure that our achievements last.*

*In this context, I would like to talk about the water situation in our countries. Harnessing this most rare and precious resource has enabled us to move forward, and all further advance will depend on our ability to put it to the best possible use.*

*We have harnessed aquifers, we have tamed watercourses and torrential rains, we have built dams, created lakes, dug channels and dotted the desert with green from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. But let us not waste even one drop of water. Let us make sure that each farmer treasures this gift from heaven and puts it to good use; that he realizes what sacrifices have been made to bring water to his doorstep; and that he, in turn, is willing to help to maintain the water networks and to develop the infrastructures.*

*Farmers must learn to apply water at the right time and in the right measure, using the most effective techniques. As I say this, I have in mind the dangers of salinization, excessive alkalinity, groundwater depletion and other processes that are already wreaking havoc in many regions.*

*Our Arab region aspires to set a shining example of rational and sound water use, and to be a practical and theoretical laboratory in this field. Our universities must train engineers and our institutes technicians. For each region, soil and crop, our extension services must develop and disseminate the appropriate techniques of irrigated cultivation, which are essential to us and will enrich our common heritage.*

Mr Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

*We all know that every ten years there are an additional 1 000 million people on our earth, which seems to be shrinking. We also know that we have very little arable land and that much of what we do have runs a serious risk of becoming infertile.*

*Is it not, therefore, manifestly clear that all our efforts should centre on sustainable development for all humanity? This is what I urge of you, this is the only path to true peace, this and not conflict in any of its multiple ethnic, religious, ideological or economic manifestations.*

*Let us then not bow to the difficulties ahead but rather muster our energies and begin by taking stock of our achievements to date. The International Conference on Nutrition, held right here nearly one year ago, not only indicated the scale of hunger – 780 million hungry*

people – but also that the number of people suffering from hunger had fallen, despite population growth, over the 20-year period in which FAO has been regularly compiling its World Food Survey.

#### **ROLE OF FAO**

*You, or rather we, are here at FAO today to take up these challenges. I, personally, have had the honour of attending five FAO Conferences and 12 sessions of the Council, and so I am well placed to speak of FAO's unique role:*

- as a universal forum where the industrialized and the developing worlds can come together on an equal footing and shape their perception of the issues at hand, of the use to be made of the latest scientific and technical tools, and of how to cooperate for a quicker and more comprehensive response;*
- as an international repository and world bank of statistical, scientific and technical information, including its vast store of collated, catalogued and analysed data which your countries have provided with the support of research institutes and expert missions; and finally*
- as a purveyor of skills which have benefited each member country in turn through technical assistance financed by donor countries and multilateral funds, and which have been made flexible – and there-*

*fore even more effective – by the regular budget's Technical Cooperation Programme.*

*These are the missions that you have entrusted to FAO and which it has untiringly assumed. Rome, however, is also home to IFAD and the World Food Programme, whose work in the cause of food and agricultural development is greatly appreciated by my country.*

*Clearly, these three centres of agricultural investment, food aid and technical expertise have been grouped in the same city to facilitate their relations with national representations and with each other. Would it not be time that these three sister agencies forged stronger links and worked more closely together to enhance their potential and their capability to tackle the formidable challenges that lie ahead?*

Mr Chairman,  
My dear friend, Edouard Saouma,

*We all have the feeling that our FAO is at a turning-point in its history. For 18 years, its activities, programmes and initiatives have been marked by efficiency and firm resolve under the guidance of one who has earned the renewed confidence of the Member Nations on two occasions.*

*When you took office as Director-General of this Organization, I knew that Lebanon would need FAO's technical skills if it was not to be left*

*impoverished and hungry by the war that others had waged on its soil. Lebanon had no wish to live on hand-outs but was anxious to fight for its rebirth and reconstruction. I am proud, as a Lebanese, that FAO was led by a man of genius from my country during those times. Mr Director-General, dear friend, I should like to express my sincere gratitude to you for your efforts, your energy and your insight, without forgetting your many innovations and achievements that will leave their stamp on this Organization and benefit all its member countries.*

*You have always been faithful to the mandate that the founding fathers entrusted to FAO. Under your leadership, the Organization has served as impartial adviser, watchful sentinel and faithful friend to the world at large.*

*As a token of the gratitude of the Lebanese people, and through us, of the populations of its member countries to this Organization; as a mark of confidence in its future and in the role that it will continue to play in the fight against hunger and the spread of knowledge for sustainable agricultural progress; on behalf of Lebanon and the Lebanese people who, on the occasion of the conclusion of your term in office, have wanted to reaffirm their faith in you and the Organization, I have the pleasure to announce the decision to donate to FAO a room for meetings, the Lebanon Room, as a symbol of our attachment to the work and role of this Organization, which has done so much for our countries, and for mine in*

*particular, during the most difficult of times and for which we shall be eternally grateful.*

Mr Chairman,  
Excellencies,

*In thanking you for being here today, I wish your Conference every success and urge the Organization to hold its steady course into the future. I have no doubt that it will choose the right successor to pursue its mission and to convey its message for the greatest benefit of all the peoples of the world.*

(Original language: French)



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