



World Food Summit: *five years later*
FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy, 10-13 June 2002



Statement by the Director-General
at the Inauguration of the
World Food Summit: *five years later*

President Ciampi,
Mr Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Your Majesties,
Honourable Heads of State and Government,
Honourable Presidents of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies,
Distinguished Ministers,
Mr Mayor of Rome,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking the participants at this important international gathering for being with us today in Rome, in particular the Heads of State and Government who have felt that the plight of the world's hungry was worth the sacrifice of making a sometimes long and exhausting journey.

I should also like to express my gratitude to the Italian Government without whom this conference could not have been held in such fine conditions. My appreciation too goes to all those who provided voluntary contributions to make up for the absence of any budget for the Summit.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the moment of truth, six years after the World Food Summit of 1996, death continues to stalk the multitude of hungry on our planet. Promises have not been kept. Worse, actions have not reflected words.

A solemn commitment was made to reduce to 400 million, by 2015, the number of men and women who have to temper their hunger with restless sleep.

Regrettably, the political will and financial resources have not matched the mark of human solidarity.

There have been major international meetings in recent years to discuss economic and financial crises, money laundering and tax havens, clandestine immigration and policing of frontiers, drug trafficking and terrorism, as well as modern technologies and the digital divide. But it was only last year in Genoa that, for the first time, a G8 Summit paid any attention to food security.

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The famines caused by drought, flooding and conflict justifiably stir people's emotions and trigger upsurges of solidarity among public opinion.

Chronic hunger, on the other hand, only meets with indifference, penalized for existing in silence and for failing to provide dramatic television. Yet, it also degrades biologically and intellectually, with the undernourished excluded from the opportunities of life.

Hunger has a heavy negative impact on the economies of those countries that it afflicts, causing an estimated one percent per year loss in rate of economic growth through reduced productivity and nutritional disease.

Significant efforts have been made since the Summit of 1996 to implement the decisions of the Heads of State and Government:

- national food security strategies have been prepared for 150 developing and transition countries;
- agricultural trade strategies have been drawn up for regional economic organizations;
- a special programme for food security for small rural producers has been put into effect in 69 countries;
- a programme of prevention against transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases is under way;
- a programme to mobilize public opinion through the media and personalities of the world of arts and culture has been in operation since 1997.

Progress has also been made towards the realization of the right to food.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

There have been many schools of economic thought, but none has advocated the development of a sector by depriving it of investment.

Yet, from 1990 to 2000, concessional assistance from the developed countries and loans from the international financing institutions fell by 50 percent for agriculture, the livelihood of 70 percent of the world's poor, as source of employment and income.

As a result, the number of undernourished has only fallen by 6 million per year instead of the 22 million needed to attain the objective set in 1996. At this rate, the target will be met 45 years behind schedule.

At the same time, the global market for agricultural commodities has continued to defy any notion of fairness.

The OECD countries transfer more than 300 billion dollars to their agricultural sectors, which means that they directly support each farmer to the tune of 12 000 dollars per year. In contrast, these same countries provide the developing countries with an estimated 8 billion dollars per year, which works out at 6 dollars for each farmer.

In addition, access to developed country markets is constrained by customs tariffs that average roughly 60 percent for primary agricultural products, as compared to about 4 percent for industrial products. Tariffs on processed agricultural goods are even higher, and are hindering the development of agro-industries in the Third World.

If we add the sanitary and technical barriers to these limiting factors, we can see just how far we still need to go to achieve agricultural terms of trade that are less unfavourable to the poorest countries.

The Doha Development Agenda augurs well for change. Let us hope that by 2005 the negotiations will have brought about fair competition in world agricultural trade.

Eliminating hunger is a moral imperative pertaining to the most basic of human rights, the right to exist. To live we have to breathe, to drink and to eat. But eliminating hunger is also in the interest of the

powerful and the asset holders. Imagine the size of the market if 800 million hungry people were to become consumers with real purchasing power. And consider how much more peaceful the world would be if there were less of the poverty that is accompanied by injustice and despair.

The societies of abundance of this new millennium have the resources and the technology to eliminate the insufferable spectre of cyclical famine and the inexorable deprivation of chronic hunger.

In the broader perspective of the elimination of poverty, related programmes need to rest on the three pillars of food, health and education.

We know how to fight hunger.

It means helping small farmers to safeguard their crops against the uncertainties of the weather, notably by controlling water, the source of life, through small harnessing, irrigation and drainage works put in place with the help of local labour.

They need to be taught simple, inexpensive and more effective ways of increasing productivity through the assistance of a critical mass of experts, especially those who work alongside them under South-South Cooperation.

They require access to inputs and credit, and they need to be able to store and to sell their products.

In brief, they need to be helped to fish rather than to be given fish. They therefore need employment and income to ensure their sustainable welfare and effective contribution to the national economy.

All the continents have conclusive examples of successful actions against hunger, examples that need to be replicated for the benefit of those not seated at the world's table.

This will require an additional 24 billion dollars in public expenditure each year.

If we exclude loans on market terms and food aid, this means finding an additional public financing of 16 billion dollars.

The developing countries will have to increase their budgetary allocation to the rural sector by 20 percent to meet half of this amount.

The developed countries and the international financing institutions will have to provide the other half, by raising the share of agriculture in their assistance to its level of 1990. This tallies with the commitment to double the level of concessional assistance made at the Conference on Financing for Development.

The Anti-Hunger Programme was released a few days ago. This preliminary form serves as a basis for work and dialogue among partners to mobilize the resources that are needed today. It is also an added contribution to the efforts of yesterday in Monterrey and of tomorrow in Johannesburg to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The mobilization of an "International Alliance against Hunger" would help revive the essential political will needed for the destiny of the world's hungry to regain centre stage in the concerns and priorities of governments, parliaments, local authorities and civil society.

Together we can overcome hunger. Let us do so now and everywhere, drawing upon your active concern, your solidarity and your unstinting support.

Thank you for your kind attention.