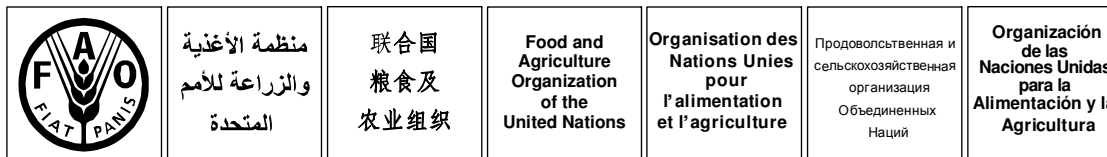


March 2012



REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Thirty-first Session

Hanoi (Viet Nam), 12–16 March 2012

STATEMENT BY THE INDEPENDENT CHAIRPERSON OF THE COUNCIL

*Mr Chairman of the Conference,
Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
Mr Director-General,
Mr Chairman of the Committee on World Food Security,
Distinguished delegates and observers,*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

On behalf of the FAO Council, I should like to express my gratitude to the Government of Viet Nam for organizing this Regional Conference and setting up all the facilities to ensure its smooth running. My thanks also go to the city of Hanoi and all the Vietnamese people for their warm welcome, their efficiency and their generosity.

I am especially honoured to be able to speak before you today, and I thank you for this honour, as I also thank the Director-General, who facilitated this address, complementing his own. In your presence this morning, I should like to congratulate Mr José GRAZIANO DA SILVA on his election – as I have already done on several occasions in Rome. We stand with him, with all our strength. We are at his side, ready for action and determined that his arrival at the head of our Organization will lead to decisive success in the fight against hunger and poverty. Together we can succeed: we must succeed.

During the previous session in Gyeongju in the Republic of Korea at the end of September 2010, I particularly stressed the new role of the regional conferences as governing bodies, reporting to the Council and the Conference. I assure you that this role is very real and that the conclusions and recommendations you adopt will be of major importance for the life of the Organization and its action on the ground. You have your part to play in the struggle we are conducting against hunger.

Hanoi is the first of the five regional conferences planned for this first half of 2012. It is up to you to show the way and consolidate this new status inaugurated in Gyeongju, so that your work here is taken into account in FAO's orientations and running, especially during the 144th Session of the Council, which will be held this June. After participating in your first three days of work, I believe you are on the right track. I should like to stress, Mr Chairman, that it will be your task to present the report on

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your work to the Council and the Conference. If need be, you may also be called on to ensure the link between the present regional conference and the next one in 2014.

Since the previous session, many events have taken place in Rome and in the field, the international context has changed, and new issues and challenges have emerged. As the June Council approaches, I want to take the opportunity of this meeting to (1) report on the conduct of the mandate you have entrusted to me, (2) give an update on implementation of the reform plan and the main developments that have affected the Council and (3) consider the outlook for the 2012–2013 biennium.

First, the conduct of my mandate

I should like to start by thanking you for renewing your confidence in me on 1 July last year. I regard this re-election for a second and final two-year term, ending in June 2013, as both an honour and a challenge. During these two years, I shall be beside the Director-General, supporting the strategic guidelines he has presented to you, while also listening to the Members. I shall spare no effort in making my contribution to updating FAO and boosting its effectiveness in the field, where it must be ever closer to those who look to our Organization for so much.

As you know, the Council has three governing committees and four technical committees, and receives the report of the Committee on World Food Security regarding programme and budget aspects, to mention only the bodies closest to it. Here I would take the opportunity to compliment Ms Gothami Indikadahena of Sri Lanka, Chairperson of the Committee on Commodity Problems, and Mr Shobhana Kumar Pattanayak of India, Chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture. I also greet His Excellency Yaya Adisa Olaitan Olaniran of Nigeria, Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security, who was elected at the last session. I congratulate them on their activities and assure them that they can count on me to facilitate the mission entrusted to them.

Almost two years ago, I presented the principles on which I was relying to animate this approach. Briefly, they were: (1) Collegiality, with the establishment of regular meetings with the chairs of the regional groups, (2) Subsidiarity, in order to avoid needless duplication by the various levels, (3) Assumption of ownership, especially through regular visits by permanent representatives in the field (in 2012, visits will be made to southern Africa in June and to Latin America in the second half of the year), (4) Independence of the Chairperson of the Council with respect to both Members and Secretariat, and (5) Partnership, in the sense of a greater involvement of civil society.

With the support of the chairs of the regional groups, with whom there is **constant dialogue**, I have been able to act according to these principles. We have regular meetings, which provide a solid foundation and thus facilitate relations with the Secretariat. I should like to take advantage of this speech to thank those men and women who are representing you today: Ms Tritaporn KHOMAPAT of Thailand, for Asia, as well as His Excellency David James RITCHIE, Ambassador of Australia, and His Excellency Trevor Donald MATHESON, Ambassador of New Zealand, for the Southwest Pacific.

I provide regular reports on my activities, especially in the **letter** I send to all the Members a few weeks before each session of the Council. **Transparency** must be the rule. I know that you are very committed to this, Mr Director-General, and you may rest assured that I am completely with you and your guidelines on this point.

Second, where have we got to in implementation of the reform plan?

You have received very detailed documents drawn up by the Secretariat, giving an account of how the process is going, so I shall not go over the same ground here. However, I should like to draw your attention to the provisions concerning government of the Organization, apart from the regional conferences to which I have already alluded. All the governing bodies, starting with the Council, have certainly benefited from the reform. They have been thoroughly **updated**, not only as regards the preparation of documents, the conduct of debates during sessions and the preparation of reports, but also as regards the planning of operations, to mention only the most important elements. The results can be seen in the running of FAO, which is more flexible and more focused on producing clear recommendations and decisions.

The Council's interviews with candidates for the post of Director-General was also a new feature of the reform plan, which we put into operation for the first time with the success you have seen. Once again, FAO has been exemplary with regard to **transparency**.

However, in order to complete these changes, there are still two essential points to be addressed. Allow me to stress them so that you can give them your full attention during this biennium. They concern:

- **The informal meeting on extrabudgetary funding.** This is an essential stage in the process of preparing the programme of work and budget and is intended to facilitate the integration of obligatory contributions with voluntary financial contributions. The next meeting should take place in early 2013. I believe that it is important to prepare for it with the greatest care, especially by involving donors from civil society and clearly setting out the priorities for which additional support is sought. The innovative mechanisms for financing development could also be discussed on this occasion.
- **Determination of the budget level by the Council,** during the session preceding the Conference. Once again, this is a key feature of the reform plan that we have not yet been able to implement. The 146th session of the Council, slated for April 2013, will provide the opportunity to put this essential element into operation, intended to facilitate preparation of the definitive detailed budget, which remains the responsibility of the Conference.

In 2011 the Conference entrusted the Council with supervising the reform, putting an end to the Conference Committee set up in 2007. Similarly, the Open-ended Working Group on Measures to Increase the Efficiency of Governing Bodies has completed its work, so that reflection is now taking place within the Council. All this shows the clear will to **integrate the reform process with the normal running of the Organization** and its various governing bodies. Spurred on by you, Mr Director-General, I have understood that this integration must be stepped up and completed in 2012. I see this as having only advantages in preserving all the benefits of this modernization for FAO.

With regard to budgetary issues, Mr Chairman, Distinguished Heads of Delegation, allow me to take this opportunity to launch a solemn appeal – an appeal to all Members, starting with those from the Asia and Pacific Region, to be so good as to make their regular annual contribution to the budget as soon as possible, and to settle any possible arrears, in line with the Organization's rules. At the June 2011 Conference, and for the first time for several years, the FAO budget was approved unanimously, demonstrating in the best possible way the complete consensus of the Members, the sacred union of the struggle against hunger. It is essential that this promise be honoured without delay. Not only the financial health of our Organization, but also its external image, depend on this – and these are two fundamental parameters affecting its activities and results. I thank you in advance for listening to this message and passing it on to the highest level of your government.

Third, what is the outlook for the current 2012–2013 biennium?

For the first time since the reform was adopted in 2008, we are in a biennium with a full 24 months. This is a good context in which to act. With a new Director-General, a budget that has been preserved despite the financial difficulties of Members, and an Organization whose **major role in combating hunger** is recognized by the international community, we are in a position to act. As the Director-General stressed, such action on the part of FAO must be perceptible on the ground and benefit first of all those who are suffering.

On the technical level, your agenda covers the priority spheres for your region. A reduction in post-harvest losses, technological innovation, crop diversification or sustainable land, soil and agricultural water management are undoubtedly thrusts that should bring us closer to our objective. Similarly – and Viet Nam is an excellent example here – the development of sustainable aquaculture brings major hope, not only in terms of food and nutrition, but also from the economic viewpoint and in terms of development of an export sector. I would take this opportunity to compliment the five regional technical commissions for their contribution to our work in their respective fields – agricultural statistics, animal production and health, fisheries, forestry, and plant protection – because this will allow regional priorities to be better identified and taken into account.

Apart from this, however, as the Director-General indicated, one of the main challenges of the biennium is that of bringing FAO closer to those most in need of it. This will entail a more effective and broader presence on the **ground**, increased **decentralization**, and programmes that are drawn up primarily on the basis of the observations and priorities of the very poorest people. The results of this Hanoi session will be of the greatest importance in this connection, for your recommendations will be taken into account at the 144th Session of the Council this June, as will those of the other regional conferences. The Council will then be able to make appropriate **adjustments to the programme of work and budget**, so that FAO is in the best possible position to act in the field, while always retaining a strong link with its headquarters in Rome and preserving the **unity** of the Organization.

On a more global level, there are other major issues to be addressed in your region, and I would highlight three of these:

- The need to protect small farmers and family farming, which will be the theme of the 2014 international year. The rural world, like other sectors of productive activity, must have the benefit of **minimum social protection** and income guarantees for the work performed and the services provided. Agricultural and food production is a global public good and every provision must be made to safeguard it, especially in the case of the most vulnerable types of farming.
- Boosting of the presence of civil society and all its stakeholders within FAO's activities, while preserving the latter's character as an intergovernmental organization. **2012** is the International Year of **Cooperatives**. The Director-General has already repeatedly stressed that this is an opportunity for FAO to establish a constructive dialogue with this type of operator, which is very active in the agricultural world in both North and South. As someone who was an agricultural unionist for many years, I am particularly glad about this approach and give it my wholehearted support. If the world of cooperatives is taken into better account alongside NGOs and private enterprise, this should make FAO's relations with civil society more dynamic and better balanced, and also allow for innovation in this sphere.
- The international calendar for 2012, especially the World Water Forum taking place this week, and the Rio+20 Summit scheduled for June. FAO is of course closely concerned in these preparations, in view of the strong link between agriculture and the environment, a link that provides more solutions than problems.

With regard to the International Years, including that of Cooperatives in 2012, Quinoa in 2013 and Family Farming in 2014, I suggest that we seize the opportunities provided by sessions of the Governing Bodies to involve them in our process of reflection.

Finally, as regards relations with other organizations and international institutions, we know that work between the secretariats is increasingly fruitful. In my view, it would be desirable for their governing bodies to have more regular exchanges at the same time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I should simply like to reiterate that I am fully girded for action, alongside the Director-General and yourselves, in the battle against hunger. We make up one single team, one single FAO acting according to the lines determined by the Director-General in liaison with the Members. The Council and the governing bodies must be permanent actors and they too must be constantly ready for action.

Since 1 January, a new wind has been blowing through the Organization, and everybody is aware that a real change of approach is taking place, now that the reform is bearing its first fruits. All this is for the greater good of FAO and hence of its mission of eradicating hunger: *Fiat Panis*, as our motto says. I feel that the conditions are excellent for successfully combating the dangers around us. Apart from material resources – the funding we have or seek and that is certainly indispensable – we must look within ourselves for the strength to act in a new way.

I call on governments and all the stakeholders in society to be even more present alongside the poorest people, in order – with FAO's help – to bring them the knowledge and means that will enable them to

produce, to live a decent life and to take their place in economic systems. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world." FAO is in the process of changing. And we must support it in this development and change ourselves as well in order to bring it toward success and eliminate the word "hunger" from our vocabulary.

I thank you for your attention.