

Social protection and agriculture

breaking the cycle of rural poverty



16 October 2015
World Food Day

World Food Day Ceremony

Friday, 16 October 2015 - Expo Milano Auditorium, 11.45 – 12.40

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A statement by FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva

World Food Day

Official Ceremony

Your Excellency Mr. SERGIO MATTARELLA, President of the Italian Republic,

Your Excellency Mr. BAN KI-MOON, Secretary General of the United Nations,

Your Royal Highness, QUEEN LETIZIA of Spain, FAO Special Ambassador for Nutrition,

Your Excellency Mr BORUT PAHOR, President of the Republic Of Slovenia,

Your Excellency Mr. PAOLO GENTILONI, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy,

Your Excellency Mr. MAURIZIO MARTINA, Minister of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policy of Italy,

Your Excellency Monsignor FERNANDO CHICA ARELLANO, representative of His Holiness The Pope,

Mr KANAYO NWANZE, President of IFAD,

Madam ERTHARIN COUSIN, Executive Director of WFP,

Your Excellencies Ministers, distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

A great welcome to you, here today to commemorate with us the birth of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations – FAO. We were born in Quebec, on 16 October 1945.

Please join me in paying tribute to the vision of our founders in creating FAO: bringing nations together after the turmoil of World War II, to free humanity from hunger, and to coordinate the management of the global food system.

Over these 70 years, population has grown three times. Despite that, food availability per person has risen by forty per cent. Now there is enough to feed all.

Let us thank those who have made this amazing achievement possible.

We thank farmers, fishermen, foresters, and all those who work in the food system. They assure our survival and protect the fragile natural resources on which humanity depends.

My special gratitude goes to those who have devoted their lives to the work of FAO and its partners.

Thank you, the people and the government of Italy, for generously hosting FAO since 1951. Thanks for kindly inviting us to EXPO for our birthday celebration.

Thank you, President Mattarella, for your inspiring words, and for reminding us of the strong links between food security and peace.

I also thank the members of the Committee on World Food Security for joining us here today. A special greeting to the outgoing Chairperson of the Committee, Ambassador Gerda Verburg, and my warm welcome to the new Chair, Ambassador Amira Gornass.

Dear Friends,

This year's World Food Day theme – "Social Protection and Agriculture" - relates to the challenges at the core of the 2030 Agenda.

Chronic hunger and famine are the worst manifestations of malnutrition.

This is the greatest injustice of our time, as the Secretary-General of the U.N. just reminded us: that many, in our world of plenty, still cannot live with health and dignity, and die early because of their hunger.

It is also economic folly, as good nutrition is one of the best sources of economic growth.

Moreover, food security and nutrition contribute to peace and stability.

For years we have known that the main reason why people face the daily anguish of hunger is that they cannot afford the food they need.

Production and economic growth alone do not solve the problem, if the hungry remain excluded.

Many countries around the world show us that increasing the power of the very poor to buy food offers an affordable key to hunger eradication.

It also builds resilience to shocks, promotes better nutrition and health, better school attendance and performance, and higher labor force participation.

Industrialized countries did the same to end widespread hunger after World War II. The food stamps programme in the US is one of many examples.

With social protection, the hungry are no longer a mere statistic. They become individuals, with registered names and addresses. They become empowered to escape hunger through their own efforts, and thus lead dignified and productive lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Secretary-General mentioned, last month countries committed to reach the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including the time-bound goal of eradicating hunger and malnutrition by 2030.

We are on the right track, I would say: 73 countries out of the 129 monitored by FAO have achieved the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the proportion of hungry people.

However, as the number of the poor and hungry went down, we have seen a rise in obesity and other forms of malnutrition.

Success ultimately depends not only on Governments but on what each of us does.

I call on all commemorating World Food Day today to make your personal commitments, for instance to eat healthily, cut food waste and help others do it.

Together we can ensure that all people enjoy their right to adequate food, resulting in the universal “freedom from want” that our founders asked for 70 years ago.

This can be our legacy to the future, and we could then honestly call ourselves the first Zero Hunger Generation.

Thank you for your attention.