

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Usually it is my role at conferences to praise the societal benefits and the quality of produce deriving from organic farming. I was delighted to listen to Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi and Dr. Alexander Müller doing it instead of me. My congratulation for their profound analyses.

What we finished today in Geneva, has started 36 years ago in Paris. A handful of organic pioneers met in Versailles in order to explore whether there is a common international understanding for a then completely new concept of agriculture and food production. The first result of this endeavour were 8 principles of organic farming which filled only one page! The rest was intuition. That was the beginning of IFOAM!

Today, we are holding two documents in our hands, the “Equitool”, a Guide for Assessing Equivalence of Organic Standards and Technical Regulation and the “IROCB”, the International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies.

This is an extraordinary success for the International Task Force on Harmonization, a Task Force jointly run by UNCTAD, FAO and IFOAM. My congratulation for all those having pursued this effort during 8th meetings, many of them among the audience. I’d like to express a special thanks to the member of the steering group, Nadia Sciallaba, Selma Doyran, Sophia Twarog, Ulrich Hoffmann, Gunnar Rundgren and Antonio Compagnoni, and to Diane Bowen running the secretariat.

Today, the challenges are the same as they were 36 years ago:

- A fast growing number of organic producers around the world cooperate or compete with each other in an even faster growing market. They want equitable terms of trade.
- Consumers in developed, emerging and developing countries are concerned about the quality of food and the sustainability of agriculture. They trust in organic food and look for credibility and guaranties.
- Regional, national and international markets for organic food are growing fast. Traders, processors and retailers want a high quality but harmonized system of equivalence of standards and finally
- Society wants farmers to deliver public benefits like maintaining biodiversity, preserving natural resources and respecting ethical values e.g. in livestock production. Public authorities are therefore interested in compliance of standards with their policy.

The ITF on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture is on of the rare examples of a successful public private partnership. The work of the ITF has been enabled by the Swedish SIDA, by the Norwegian NORAD and by the Swiss Government. I am convinced that these donors have made an excellent investment and therefore want to congratulate them and thank for that as well.

IFOAM is going to integrate the results of the Task Force and the two new tools into its policy, I’m sure of that. My colleagues from the World Board of IFOAM, Ong Kung Wai, Fabio Piccioli and André Leu, who attend this conference with me, will support me. The outcome of the ITF process will already be on the agenda of the next board meeting which will take place next month in Bonn.

For the future activities, I see many advantages of this kind of public private partnerships. Therefore, it is most interesting for IFOAM to continue and intensify the partnership. IFOAM

is a comprehensive network of knowledge, experience, activities and professionals for organic food & farming and will bring all these into a successful cooperation.

Most topics discussed during the ITF meeting seem to be highly technical. Nonetheless, we should keep in mind that the overriding objective of the work is how to bring sustainability down to earth by synchronising all the stakeholders along the entire food chain into **acting** sustainably.

Equivalency of standards will be the first step, harmonized standards and procedure might be the next one. I'm looking forward to these next steps.

Dr. Urs Niggli, Vice President of IFOAM.