

ADDRESS BY MR. TOM HAYES, T.D. MINISTER OF STATE AT THE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & THE MARINE, IRELAND
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 38th SESSION OF THE FAO CONFERENCE
IN ROME 17th June 2013

[Director General], distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be here today, to represent Ireland on the occasion of the 38th FAO conference.

It is useful to remind ourselves that we are here to discuss food and nutrition security. 870 million people are hungry as we sit here today. That is almost twice the population of the entire European Union. It is good to see that we have begun to make progress in developing the necessary political will and commitment to end this shameful reality.

To help us to focus, we should reflect on the life of a poor smallholder farmer who wakes up early each morning determined to ensure her family's survival. She needs food, water and fuel. But they are in scarce supply. There is only one staple crop. The surrounding farms are scorched by severe drought because the rains failed. The science of climate change seems a million miles away from her homestead but its impact can be seen in the withered maize stalks and on the face of her baby daughter who is chronically malnourished and struggling to survive. How will her children grow and develop, or access health services or education?

This is a familiar story to those who are trying to cope on the frontline of the fight against hunger and malnutrition and the challenges of climate change. But it is only part of the picture.

It is not just about the quantity of food grown but also its quality and diversity. We often overlook the impact of climate change on water, sanitation and health, but the impacts can be seen in the spread of diseases. And of course there is the effect on food prices and the affordability of food. High food prices hit the poor hardest.

Ireland is playing its part in meeting these challenges. We had our own experience of famine, during what we call the Great Hunger, in the 1840s. Back then Ireland had a fast growing population of 8 million people. Small subsistence farmers were dependent on one crop, the potato. The crop failed. With poor governance and the failure of leadership to address the situation, the tragedy unfolded. More than one million Irish people died of starvation and over one million more were forced to emigrate. This historical perspective underpins our commitment to combating hunger. That is why, during the Irish Presidency of the EU, we held a major international conference in Dublin, which brought together key policy makers as well as local and grassroots representatives from around the globe facing the realities of rising food prices, failed crops, under-nutrition and hunger.

Also Ireland recently endorsed a new 'Global Nutrition for Growth' Compact pledging to double its nutrition efforts over the next 8 years. This represents an ambitious commitment. We will do this by having a greater focus on fortifying food staples and crops with vitamins and minerals. We will increase our focus on hunger and under-nutrition across our entire programme in line with Ireland's new policy for international development, '*One World, One Future*'.

Ireland's response to addressing global hunger and under-nutrition, focuses on:

- helping poor smallholder and women farmers in Africa to increase their productivity,
- targeting under-nutrition in mothers and children, and
- promoting governance and leadership action to reduce global hunger and under-nutrition.

Ireland's Presidency of the EU has come at a pivotal time in international development, as we approach the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and shape the post 2015 agenda.

Ireland has worked closely with the European Commission on the development of a new EU Nutrition Policy to enhance maternal and infant nutrition. The new EU Plan entitled "Boosting Food and Nutrition Security through EU Action: Implementing our Commitments" sets out how we plan to translate our policy commitments into action over the period from 2014 to 2020.

I want to see us create a new vision of the poor smallholder farmer. In this alternate vision, the farmer has received advice and assistance from her local farmer support group to intercrop legumes and nitrogen-fixing trees with maize in her field. By doing so she has improved soil fertility and has, in turn, increased her maize yields. Indeed she has a surplus, which she has sold at the market, giving her additional income.

Such transformation is possible. Let us use the diversity of our experience to put forward innovative solutions and take leadership at every level. By doing so, we can improve the lives not just of this generation, but future generations to come.