

36th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

Monday, 11 October 2010

FINAL VERSION

**Statement by MS Swaminathan,
Chairperson of the Steering Committee of the
High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition**

Mr Chairman and Members of the Committee Bureau

Excellencies,

Director-General of FAO, Jacques Diouf

Madam the Executive Director of WFP, Josette Sheeran

Madam the Vice-President of IFAD, Yukiko Omura

UNSG Special representative, David Nabarro

Members of the Advisory Group,

Honorable Delegates and Observers,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor for me to address the Committee as the Chair of the Steering Committee of the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition.

This is the first statement of a Chairperson of the HLPE at CFS. This is the first session of the renewed CFS. On behalf of the Vice-Chair, Madam

Mariam Rahmanian and the other 13 members of the Steering Committee, I thank you for this opportunity.

I am proud to lead this new panel charged with the task of assisting CFS in the development of public policies and strategies which can help to achieve the goal of food and nutrition security for every member of the human family. There is indeed a long road ahead of us. But we have already begun our journey with renewed determination and greater convergence in planning and action.

Why the HLPE?

The reform of the CFS is a fundamental change in the international governance of food security and nutrition. I wish to pay my tribute to all responsible for this transformation.

We are convinced that the food and nutrition security problem that humankind faces will find its solutions on the ground, where nearly two billion women and men toil in sun and rain, night and day to produce food for us. We also know that it requires interventions from local to global levels, and the mainstreaming of the gender dimension in public policy and action. It requires an integrated approach. To be effective, these interventions need to be strongly coordinated - between countries, between sectors, and between actors so that there is synergy among technology, public policy and farmers' efforts.

Past experience shows that this task of generating such synergy is not easy:

- First, because decisions need often to be taken in spite of a vast field of uncertainties with respect to the knowledge base, as for example in the areas of price volatility and climate change, but also with respect of the potential effects of policies on the ground.
- Second, because different actors sometimes carry competing interests that are often sustained by different streams of information and knowledge. This can lead to divergence of viewpoints
- Third, because there is a need to pursue actions, even of short terms, on solid grounds, to guarantee their sustained impact

These challenges explain the need for CFS to create a process like the HLPE that stands at the interface of expertise and policy-making and aims to promote the fusion of political will and professional skill:

- Member states need to ground their deliberations on shared and sound experience and expertise, analysis and advice. They must be informed of the uncertainties at play, their nature and their level, while at the same time deliberating on methods of scaling up successful efforts both by governments and the private sector.
- Controversies need to be identified, and, if they cannot be resolved, their fundamentals must be disentangled.
- Political decisions should promote community level food security systems, based on climate resilient farm technologies. This will call for the enlargement of the food basket so as to include nutrition rich, underutilized crops. This has to be a priority arena for action in this year designated as the International Year of Biodiversity.

This is why the CFS, international and intergovernmental decision making and coordination platform should make the most of the dedicated, shared and independent expertise that the HLPE represents.

Doing things differently with the HLPE

We all agree that the HLPE was not created to be “just one more panel of experts”. This is very important. When we look at the issue of knowledge in food and nutrition security, we face essential and, to my feeling, embarrassing questions.

First, despite all the knowledge we now possess and the uncommon opportunities opened up by new technologies there are still over 925 million hungry people in the world

Second, hunger persists in spite of numerous national and international nutrition safety net programs, thus emphasizing the need for reviewing the governance of delivery systems. The “**deliver as one approach**” of the UN system with reference to food availability, economic and social access and absorption in this body is an important step in this direction, since this will help to address interrelated issues in a mutually reinforcing manner.

It is such questions that need to be addressed.

The very reason of our common failure is not a shortage of knowledge in the first place. We have to mobilize knowledge based on successful accomplishments at the field level for shaping public policy and action.

We have to look on how it can convert technical know-how into field level do how.

We have to look at how the successful models can be used to raise public awareness and generate a “we shall overcome” spirit.

In other words, it is solution and success oriented knowledge that is now urgently needed.

A common understanding of the specific role of the HLPE

The HLPE stays at the doorstep of its first stream of work. It is very important that we, members of the HLPE, and all of you, policy makers at national levels, and all UN organizations, share a common understanding of the exact role of the HLPE.

The joint meeting between the Steering Committee of the HLPE and the Bureau of the CFS in 16-17 September was a decisive step towards generating a common wavelength in relation to the way forward.

The HLPE was not created to solve a single, identified, technical problem whose solution can only be found in a particular laboratory in the world.

The HLPE was created because the problem of food security is a global, complex issue, that has many facets, and is interlinked with many other problems, both food and non-food.

It was created because sometimes it is difficult to even identify the very nature of the problems ahead.

It was created because policy-making in such a complex environment is very difficult and needs advice at a more strategic level, advice that can help policymakers identify emerging issues and prioritize decisions relating to resource allocation.

It was created because of the conviction that advice shall be based on multi-disciplinary expertise and knowledge from actors in the field.

We, HLPE and CFS, are, in our relations, at the beginning of a process, from which we will both learn. But this is, to our belief, the common understanding that we share now on the specific role and added-value of the HLPE in matters relating to sustainable food and nutrition security.

What do we expect from this meeting? Importance of the directions given to HLPE

This session of the CFS is very important for the HLPE. What do I, as the Chair of the Steering Committee of the HLPE, expect from it?

We, members of the Steering Committee of the HLPE have already received our Terms of Reference, our rules of Procedures from CFS.

To begin our operations, we now need a clear mandate from the CFS and its Bureau. We need to know on what key issues the panel should provide knowledge-based strategic advice, so that the advice becomes demand driven and fulfills a felt need.

At our meeting with the Bureau of the CFS, it was recognized that while it is important for the HLPE to receive directions from the CFS on what issues to report on, it was also equally important for the HLPE to perform a pro-active role and identify major emerging and strategic issues for policy advice and recommendation.

In that sense, interaction between CFS and the HLPE is a two-way process.

The CFS Bureau has already made much progress before the Steering Committee members were appointed. This resulted in the identification of topics for the Round Tables, and in particular the Round Table on Risks and Vulnerabilities. A possible outcome would be directions given to the HLPE.

The Steering Committee members believe that “managing vulnerability and risk to promote better food security and nutrition” is a wide ranging topic far beyond climate change and price volatility.

We feel the issue of climate change is of paramount importance in relation to agriculture, food security and nutrition, and that it deserves to be specifically discussed at CFS and with an input from the HLPE. But it could be tackled in a subsequent year, after a review of the current activity and initiatives in the field, particularly the Cancun Conference.

However we are ready to tackle the issue of price volatility:

- Because it is an issue that triggered the recent food crisis in the first place, and provoked the reform of the international governance of food security and even the creation of the HLPE.
- Because it is also a problem that needs a strategic analysis that goes much beyond economic or market policies and measures.

If all the problems of food security, nutrition, agriculture and rural development were to be solved by analyzing and providing advice on only one single issue, we would not be sitting in this room. There are plenty of outstanding issues, all of them are well arguable. The fact that a debate must take place should not preclude us from starting our work, or delay our program. We are therefore eager to receive your guidance in determining priorities in our work.

The demand from CFS is important. The supply from HLPE is also important. We need to have better visibility through increased and appropriate levels of contributions to the Trust Fund that supports the work of the HLPE.

The HLPE does not aim at creating a new administration. Experts work here for free, as they do in other panels. But there is a need for minimal secretariat, technical support, arrangements of face-to-face meetings that are indispensable to launch and finalize own contributions. We hope that pledges can be made to allow the HLPE to work properly during the 2 years' mandate you have assigned to it.

Next steps: 2nd StC meeting, update of the Roster

We, HLPE Steering Committee members, have decided to meet again in December. We are already at work to define our internal working methods, in the framework of the Rules of Procedures that you have given us. We have organized ourselves to prepare the scope of a study on price volatility and its impact on vulnerability to food insecurity. We have organized ourselves to prepare an analysis of emerging issues. At our meeting in December, we will take final decisions on all these points, and constitute Project Teams, based also on the suggestions emerging from this meeting of CFS.

As you know, Project Teams will be formed by the Steering Committee using experts registered in a Roster. We have decided to launch a call to update the existing Roster, which dates back to January 2009. An internet-based dedicated procedure of submission of nominations will be opened next week. Instructions on how to submit names will be found on-line, at the CFS-HLPE website. The procedure will be only internet based. All CFS constituencies are invited to submit names of competent experts to participate in our time-bound Project Teams. The workload of the Project Teams will be substantial in the first semester of 2011.

In this manner, we can foster the emergence of a **Coalition of the Concerned** with reference to elimination of hunger.

Conclusion

Excellencies, Honorable Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The road ahead of us is not an easy one, as is clear from the past experience.

We, in the HLPE and in the Steering Committee, are determined to bring a new and meaningful contribution to the work of the Committee on World Food Security.

We assure you that we will do our best to be of help to you in your efforts to pay integrated attention to all the three major forms of hunger, namely, chronic protein-energy under and malnutrition, hidden hunger caused by the deficiency of micro-nutrients, and transient hunger resulting from natural calamities or internal disorders.

On behalf of Ms Maryam Rahmanian and the other members of the Steering Committee, I thank you very much.