

Fighting global hunger tops agenda at high-level UN talks in Rome



CFS to be the cornerstone of global food security.

11 October 2010 – Meeting against the backdrop of recent increases in food prices, delegates have **gathered** in Rome today for United Nations-led talks focusing on issues such as land tenure, international investment in agriculture and food security during crises.

The Committee on World Food Security (**CFS**) has been undergoing reform with the aim of making the body the most inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all relevant stakeholders to work together to ensure food security and nutrition for all.

The current session is the first with an expanded group of stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, UN bodies, the private sector and philanthropic representatives.

In his message to the delegates, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the expanded membership, saying the world required formal global governance on food security.

"I welcome your efforts to debate and resolve some of the serious tensions that arise over food security, which often have deep political features. And I commend your decision to tackle these issues head-on, through negotiation and mediation, despite their difficulty. You have the full support of the UN system for your work," Mr. Ban said in the **message**, delivered by his Special Representative on Food Security and Nutrition, David Nabarro.

"I look forward to watching the Committee evolve and address issues such as the support for smallholder farmers, land acquisition, the interests of women, nutrition, price volatility, climate change and, in particular, the establishment of food trading systems that work without destabilizing markets.

"I am especially keen to see the right to food become the basis of all our efforts for food and nutrition security. This is one of the keys to halving global hunger, the first Millennium

Development Goal (**MDG**), which in turn can have a multiplier effect across all our development goals," the Secretary-General added.

The Committee will receive advice from a High-Level Panel of Experts in a variety of fields associated with food security and nutrition. The CFS Secretariat is now made up of members from the three Rome-based UN agencies – the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**), the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development (**IFAD**) and the UN World Food Programme (**WFP**).

Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of WFP, said that the meeting "marks the launch of a strategically coordinated global effort to draw on the combined strengths of all stakeholders engaged in the fight against global hunger. With recent volatility in commodity prices and increased global demand for food this comes not a moment too soon," she said.

"For the CFS to be concrete in action and achieve tangible results," noted FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf, "it is also vital that partnerships and linkages be established at country level through proper and recognized mechanisms, like the thematic groups and national alliances for food security."

Yukiko Omura, IFAD's Vice President, noted that investing in small farmers by improving their access to land, to appropriate technology, financial services and markets, and responding to their other requirements is the most effective way to lift them out of poverty and hunger.

Also attending the week-long meeting is Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, who said that the meeting "will be a test for the ability of the reformed CFS to shape an international consensus on such delicate issues as land grabbing or speculation on agricultural commodities."

He said the discussion on the "Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investments" developed by the World Bank and other bodies to regulate large-scale land acquisitions, and the initiatives to combat volatility of prices on food commodity markets, including a discussion on the role of financial speculation, will be crucial.

Mr. De Schutter, who reports to the UN Human Rights Council in an independent and unpaid capacity, has been critical of the growth in large-scale land acquisitions, while aiming to forge a consensus.

"In my view," he noted, "the CFS should not ratify the principles as self-standing, but rather welcome the contribution as one part of a much larger attempt to improve the responsible governance of land tenure and other natural resources.

"Where land is underutilized or considered vacant, the question of whether it should be redistributed to allow small independent farmers to use it should be asked first, before considering whether large-scale investment complies with a set of principles," he said.

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