

# UNITED NATIONS FOOD SUMMIT — HOPE FOR THE HUNGRY?

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## INTRODUCTION

The right to food flows from the right to life. Everything depends on eating and eating nutritiously: the ability to walk, to talk and smile, to go to school, to enjoy good health. There is hardly anything more basic to life than eating. If we stop eating, we die. In this basic sense, the issue of food and hunger concerns all of us.

Feeding the hungry has a deeply religious significance in the Scriptures. Jesus said: "I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink...". It is on the basis of such action that we will be judged at the end of time (Mt 25:35). At another time, Jesus told his disciples to distribute the bread he had multiplied to the hungry crowd, and they "all ate and were satisfied" (Mk 6:33-44). In the words of Jesus we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread".

When we celebrate the Eucharist, Christ becomes present to us in the form of bread and wine. When we 'remember' what Jesus did the night before he died in the 'breaking of bread', we are challenged to follow his example today by sharing bread with our brothers and sisters in need. By sharing the one bread we are united into the one body of Christ, the one community, so that we simply cannot ignore the needs of those around us. St Paul points out the impossibility of a dignified celebration of the Eucharist when at the same time the hungry are ignored (cf. 1 Cor 11). Therefore, our religious celebrations have very practical consequences in terms of our responsibilities towards the hungry of this world.

It is clear enough that we have good reasons to be involved in addressing world hunger. Does it necessarily follow that we should have participated in the World Food Summit process? Many of you may well say that our time, money and effort would have been much better spent addressing hunger directly — in Eastern Zaire and other obvious areas of need — and not attending a World Food Summit. Reports of the

activities of some delegates attending the Summit — both in their home countries and in Rome itself, as reported in the media, would reinforce this view.

I would like to justify my participation in the World Food Summit on the basis of my understanding of Christian care. Indeed, as Christians we care about the hungry in the world. Such caring is an integral part of our everyday ministry. However, I feel that it is important to deepen our sense of caring by drawing attention to the injustices and inequalities that lie at the root of hunger. This means going beyond the symptoms to address the causes. The phenomenon of hunger on a world-wide scale points to underlying structural problems. Hunger in the world is not simply due to misfortune or laziness or ignorance or lack of development. People do not choose to become hungry. Nor can chronic hunger simply be attributed to natural causes (drought, etc.), although these sometimes play an important role. Hunger is rather the consequence of economic, social, cultural and political structures that are marked by injustice. People are hungry not because they lack bread but because they lack justice. As a consequence of structural injustice, or 'structures of sin' as Pope John Paul II calls them, hunger spreads and the freedom and dignity of all of us is diminished. Our caring cannot be content to relieve the hunger of a few people while the 'structures of sin' continue to perpetuate hunger on a massive scale. Our sense of caring must be broad enough to address these 'structures of sin'. Participation in the Summit has given me and many other Christians the opportunity to care in this broader sense of the term. By attending the Summit we could press key decision-makers on the world stage to address with the utmost urgency the root causes of world hunger and to implement the necessary remedial action.

## The Challenge Facing the Summit

The World Food Summit was an important event, offering an opportunity to put the spotlight on the grave problem of world hunger in our day and on the

untold human suffering that goes with it. A few statistics highlight the gravity of the problem:

- Between 800 and 840 million people in developing countries today face chronic malnutrition. Around 200 million children under the age of five suffer from acute or chronic protein and energy deficiencies.
- 40,000 people die each day as a consequence of hunger and malnutrition.
- A fifth of the world's population has no access to safe drinking water.
- 88 nations fall into the category of low-income food-deficit countries.
- External assistance (bilateral and multilateral) to developing country agriculture is declining.
- The total UN budget for tackling hunger amounts to less than 5 per cent of expenditure in one developed country on slimming products.
- Fisheries are being over-exploited, forests are being destroyed and thousands of square miles of arable land are being turned into desert each year.
- Landmines are disrupting agricultural activity in 110 countries.
- The world population is expected to rise from the present 5.7 billion to 8.7 billion by the year 2030, which is bound to make greater demands on finite natural resources.
- The FAO calculates that if no action is taken to reverse the present trend, the number of chronically undernourished people may still be some 730 million by the year 2010, over 300 million of them in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Food prices on the world market have risen sharply in the past year, creating a major problem for net food-importing developing countries.
- Food aid volumes have dropped considerably in the same period.
- In many parts of the world, including the Great Lakes Region, hunger is closely associated with civil conflict.

It is against this dramatic and worsening background that it was decided to call a World Food Summit. It was felt that immediate action was needed to attack the root causes of persistent food insecurity. It was hoped that the personal participation of Heads of State and Government in the Summit would mobilise the necessary political will to address the problem of world hunger in a fundamental way.

Tackling world hunger is truly more a question of political will than specialist knowledge. Although knowledge is important, it is generally known what is needed. Hungry farmers are in no doubt about what they need. They need fair prices for their products. They need access to land, water, seeds, fertiliser (preferably organic) and affordable credit.

They need effective food stores. In short, they need the means to feed themselves.

Hungry urban dwellers also know what they need. They need access to work and fair wages, that is, the means to earn their livelihood. And they need access to shops that sell safe and nutritious food at an affordable price throughout the year.

Hungry people depend on their Governments and the international community not to feed them, but to create the conditions that will allow them to feed themselves. Therein lies the significance of the World Food Summit. This was the opportunity for Governments to commit themselves to creating such conditions, for example:-

- infrastructure, particularly all-weather roads to allow hungry farmers to get to the local market to sell their produce;
- research, training and extension which builds on rather than replaces farmers' traditional knowledge and skills;
- labour-saving technologies to produce, process and prepare food — targeted particularly to women who form the majority of farmers in many developing countries;
- decentralised systems of storage and early warning;
- local, national and regional food security reserves.

### **The Preparatory Process**

The preparatory process for the Summit involved consultations with Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, and the private sector. It was preceded by a number of FAO Regional Conferences — in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, etc. A number of background technical background papers covering the key issues, e.g. agricultural trade and sustainable agriculture, were produced.

A first draft of the Rome Declaration and the Plan of Action appeared in January of this year. These are the documents which set out the actual plans to tackle world hunger (SHOW). The FAO's Committee on World Food Security, an intergovernmental body, revised the text of the documents in a series of meetings during the year. Governments made their suggestions for revision mainly as blocs — the Group of 77, the European Union, the U.S., and the Cairns Group (Australia, Canada, etc.). The text was finalised in the final days of October. It was intended that the text be signed by the Heads of Government during the Summit. However, at the last moment, some Governments

made their acceptance of the final text dependent on *not* having to sign it at the Summit.

Incidentally, the fact that everything was agreed beforehand meant that there was no real debate at the official Summit itself. The lack of debate and controversy was reflected in a certain degree of boredom and dis-orientation among the delegates attending the Summit — not to mention the media present.

### The Involvement of NGOs

I would like to say a word here about the involvement of farmers' organisations, development agencies and other NGOs in the preparatory process.

The hungry farmers and town dwellers were the real 'stakeholders' in the Summit process — "stake-holders": you learn a whole new language at these Summits! The term refers to the people who had most to win or lose through the Summit process. Hungry people's own representatives, development agencies and some sympathetic Governments struggled hard in the past few months to ensure that it was their priorities, and not those of the 'steak-eaters' which predominated in the Summit's Plan of Action.

The nature of the participation of NGOs in the Summit process was very much shaped by their grassroots experiences — their successes and failures in improving the access of hungry farmers and town dwellers to productive resources and income.

As a participant in the Food Security Group of the Liaison Committee of Development NGOs to the Europe Union, I myself was involved in a series of attempts to influence the position of the EU on the Summit Plan of Action. Consultation with NGOs from the South was an important point of reference for the work of our Group. In particular, the NGO reports from the Asia, Latin America, Africa and other Regions helped to define our positions.

In fact, it is not in Brussels but in the national capitals of member States that EU decisions are made. So meetings with officials of EU Member State Governments were an important part of the Food Security Group's preparations for the World

Food Summit. I was part of an Irish NGO delegation that discussed the Summit with officials from the Departments of Agriculture and Foreign Affairs in Ireland. Ireland has held the Presidency of the EU in the latter half of 1996, and we pressed the Government to take full advantage of this position to speak out on behalf of hungry farmers with all the authority of a country that still experiences the painful memories and consequences of a famine that occurred 150 years ago in our own country. While we knew that Ireland could not solve the problem of world hunger, we felt it was well positioned to generate international political will to do so.

The key way in which the Food Security Group sought to influence the outcome of the Summit was to make written submissions on the various drafts of the Rome Declaration and Plan of Action as they appeared during the year. In their submissions, the Group constantly highlighted issues such as the key role of small farmers, herders and fishers and their representative organisations in achieving food security, and the need for trade policies to be compatible with food and agriculture policies.

On behalf of the Food Security Group, I attended a special FAO-NGO consultation on the Draft Rome Declaration and Plan of Action in Rome in mid-September. The following week, I was an observer at the meeting of the Committee on World Food Security, where I watched officials struggle to find their way through a thicket of hundreds of square brackets, each bracket representing a point of disagreement on the course of action that needed to be taken to reduce world hunger.

With respect to the World Food Summit itself, which was held in Rome last week: A number of NGOs and NGO networks from around the world were accredited as observers to the Summit. In addition, some NGO networks, including my own, were represented on their national delegations attending the Summit.

A number of events were held parallel to the official Summit, including a Parliamentarians' Day and a Youth Forum. I myself attended a few sessions of the NGO Forum that took place in Ostiense Station,

***Besides active solidarity with the hungry at grassroots level, religious and missionaries should also seek to influence the policies of the economic and political decision-makers in a way that will promote food security. We need to be present in the struggle to change those priorities — putting food for all before profits for the few.***

not far from the FAO building. This Forum prepared an NGO Declaration that was later delivered at the official Summit, and held workshops on a number of key issues (trade, sustainable agriculture, women and food security, etc.). Apart from its educational value, the NGO Forum was an important occasion for organising lobbies of delegates attending the official Summit and for facilitating long-term networking among the NGO representatives present at the Forum and active around the world.

Another important parallel event was the Hunger Gathering. Although I did not have the opportunity to attend this event, I sense that what happened there was perhaps more relevant to the needs of the hungry than what happened in any other of the fora in Rome last week.

## THE ROME DECLARATION AND PLAN OF ACTION

During the Summit, we heard many fine speeches from Heads of Government. The Secretary General referred to hunger as “a direct affront not only to the physical integrity but also to the very dignity of the human person. Hunger is an insult to the fundamental values of the international community”. The Vice-President of Ecuador stated that her Government was committed to fighting poverty and to giving primary importance to the social area and sustainable development. The President of the Council of the European Union, reacting to the statistics of hunger, said, “Through this Summit we wish to affirm our absolute resolve that this appalling situation cannot, and will not, be permitted to continue”. The President of Cuba declared, “Let truth reign, and not hypocrisy and lies. Let us be aware that in this world, hegemony, arrogance and selfishness should cease”. The Deputy President of South Africa added, “The hungry have a right to be fed”. In the statement from the Philippines we read, “Fully committed to the noble objectives of this Food Summit, the Philippine Government has pursued, and will continue to pursue policies designed to achieve food security”.

This all sounds impressive, but as one commentator put it, “words will not feed the hungry”. In any case, the commitments made in the addresses to the Summit have no binding character. By contrast, commitments agreed in the Summit’s Plan of Action are binding. I therefore propose to spend some time analysing the contents of this document, rather than analysing the addresses and statements to the Summit.

In my following comments, I will follow the structure of the Summit Plan of Action. I am not attempting to make a synopsis the whole document. Rather, I comment on what I consider to be the most important issues from the perspective of enabling hungry people to feed themselves. Heads of Governments made seven commitments as follows:

- Commitment One: An Enabling Environment for Food Security
- Commitment Two: Equal Access to Nutritionally Adequate and Safe Food
- Commitment Three: Sustainable Agriculture
- Commitment Four: Trade and Food Security
- Commitment Five: Emergencies
- Commitment Six: Investment in Food Security
- Commitment Seven: Implementation of the Plan of Action

## INTRODUCTION

One would expect in the introduction to the Plan of Action an analysis of *why* there is hunger in the world. In fact, there is little such analysis. The general tendency is to attribute hunger to poverty or civil conflict. This simply begs further questions, such as why is there so much poverty, and what lies at the root of the growing number of social conflicts in the world?

The sense of urgency is also missing from the Introduction: Governments moved the original target date for reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level from 2010 to 2015, although a mid-term review is planned to ascertain if the target can be met by the earlier date. Moreover, one can question the morality of a target that contemplates over 400 million people going to bed hungry after 2015.

### Commitment One — An Enabling Environment for Food Security

Commitment One (also Commitment Five) identifies civil conflict as one of the primary causes of hunger and malnutrition. It stresses the importance of a peaceful environment for food security. And indeed, conflict has an immediate negative impact on food security: scarce financial and human resources are diverted away from agricultural production, crops are destroyed, landmines impede agricultural activity, and people are forced to migrate from their sources of food. The tragedy in Rwanda and Eastern Zaire underlines this close connection between conflict and hunger. To address such situations, the

Plan of Action points to the importance of conflict prevention and resolution, as well as the need to reduce excessive global military expenditures and the arms trade (Art. 53 (g)). NGOs welcome this recognition of the international dimension to local conflicts.

Perhaps it was too much to hope that Commitment One would contain an analysis of the links between hunger and the structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and World Bank. Such links are real and visible. Riots broke out in Jordan in August 1995, when, implementing an IMF-sponsored structural adjustment programme, the Government announced the decision to raise the price of basic foods sharply. There are strong grounds for believing that structural adjustment adversely affects food security by:

- switching production resources from food crops for domestic consumption to export crops;
- cutting spending on agricultural support (credit, infrastructure, etc.);
- inducing higher prices for farm inputs and food;
- cutting jobs in the public sector leading to increased numbers of food insecure in urban areas;
- creating a gender bias, whereby women have to make good the food shortages caused by structural adjustment through their extra labour.

Commitment One should have pressed for fundamental changes in those aspects of adjustment policies which even the FAO itself sees as generating “a new class of poor”. I am quoting here from a recent FAO publication, *World Agriculture: Towards 2010*.

There is a good section on gender in Commitment One, calling, for example, for “gender-sensitive legislation providing women with secure and equal access to and control over productive resources including credit, land and water”.

This section also commits Governments to ensure “that a gender perspective is mainstreamed in all policies”. However, gender is hardly mainstreamed in the Plan of Action itself. Some substantive statements on the gender aspects of food security appear in Commitments Two to Seven, but they are few and far between. The Plan of Action should have named and addressed gender differentials with respect to the whole range of food security issues, namely: equality of access to food, emergency situations, sustainable agriculture, agricultural trade, investment, and the implementation of the Plan of Action itself.

### **Commitment Two — Equal Access to Nutritionally Adequate and Safe Food**

This Commitment spells out in considerable detail all that is involved in ensuring access to nutritionally adequate and safe food, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals, households and groups that cannot meet their own needs. Thus it speaks of: policies to encourage stable employment; equal access to productive resources; well targeted social welfare and nutrition safety nets; the quality and safety of food supply; use of culturally appropriate, traditional and under-utilised food crops; basic education and primary health care provision. This is a practical and useful section in the Plan of Action.

### **Commitment Three — Sustainable Agriculture**

Commitment Three makes some positive statements on sustainable agriculture relating to topics such as the conservation of natural resources, the sustainable use of crop and animal genetic diversity, organic farming, water management, conservation of forests and fisheries resources, appropriate technology and research, and the strengthening of farmers’ organisations. This was perhaps the least controversial section of the document, which reflects the strong gains made in this area since the Rio Conference on the Environment and Development.

NGOs were keen to have the phrase ‘*multiple functions of agriculture*’ included in the text. That phrase indicates that in addition to producing food for the market, agriculture has roles such as sustaining rural communities and caring for the environment. The negotiators finally agreed to include a weakened form of this phrase, namely, “the multi-functional character of agriculture”.

A basic question for Commitment Three (and the whole Plan of Action) is who are we referring to when we say “*farmer*”. In September, negotiators spent many hours trying to define a “farmer”. Some preferred the term ‘food producer’, especially the representatives of the food transnationals who produce food in their biotechnological laboratories, and are increasingly dominating markets with their products. NGOs, on the other hand, focus on small farmers, herders, fisherfolk, forest dwellers and the like (see Art. 36 (c)).

Resources and services required to become effective producers (land, water, credit, etc.) are all mentioned in Commitment Three. However, they are generally not directly linked to the situation of *small farmers* (including women farmers), particularly those in so-called ‘low-potential’ areas. Experience shows that most resources and services tend to flow to large-scale farmers who already have such. An effective food security policy must accord a high priority to small-scale farmers, and introduce specific measures which will ensure that resources and services flow directly to them. Commitment Three contains some useful statements on this, but taken overall is rather weak in this respect.

Commitment Three recognises the serious threat posed to long-term food security by the erosion of *agricultural diversity*. 75 per cent of crop diversity has disappeared from farmers’ fields since the beginning of this century. The Plan of Action recognises the need for diversity in species and genetic resources and the need to expand the production and use of traditional and under-utilised food crops. It also recognises the right of farmers to have access to genetic resources for food and agriculture (Commitment Two), and calls for “fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of such resources” (Commitment Three).

Commitment Three could have spelt out in more detail the implications of a commitment to preserving and enhancing biodiversity: the signing by all countries of the UNCED Biodiversity Convention; increased funding for biodiversity programmes, including the allocation of more resources to support farmers’ own genetic resources programmes; recognition by the World Trade Organisation of a *sui generis* community rights system of ownership of genetic resources as a legitimate alternative to its own industrial patent system.

#### **Commitment Four — Trade and Food Security**

Trade was by far the most contentious issue in the discussions on the Plan of Action. I would like to comment on a few key problem-areas:

##### ***Food Security Clause***

NGOs lobbied — unsuccessfully — to have a food security clause included in Commitment Four. Such a clause would have exempted staple food crops from trade liberalisation commitments.

##### ***Transnational corporations***

Transnational corporations control a huge share of world food trade. In fact, six of the largest TNCs account for 75 per cent of all world trade in grain. Small-scale farmers and local co-operatives are expected to compete with these in the one so-called

‘free’ market. Surely they are being asked to play on a very uneven playing field. NGOs managed to have a reference to some kind of regulation of TNCs trading in agricultural commodities included in an

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earlier draft of the Plan of Action. Such regulation in fact existed a few years ago under UN auspices. But this — if I may use a food metaphor — was a ‘hot potato’ for negotiators. So, after all of 10 seconds discussion in the Malaysia Room in the FAO building on Thursday, 26 September 1996, the reference to regulating TNC activities trading in agricultural commodities was deleted from the text. If you did not know already, you now know who runs the world!

##### ***Self-reliance***

Earlier drafts of the Plan of Action recognised that the promotion of domestic agriculture was essential to the goal of food security. They acknowledged the need of developing countries to protect themselves from unstable world markets. But later drafts placed greater emphasis on trade measures that would open and globalise all agricultural markets. NGOs advocate trade measures which maximise local trade, within diversified local economies. The Plan of Action should have recognised the right of developing countries to pursue a greater degree of self-reliance in food production, at national or regional level. This dimension of food security receives too little attention in the document.

### ***Market Access***

The earlier drafts of the Plan of Action recommended increased international market access for developing countries' agricultural produce, and, with a view to encouraging and facilitating this, called for greater diversification and processing of agricultural produce by developing countries themselves. However, the use of escalating tariffs means that it is precisely value-added agricultural products that have most difficulty in gaining access to the markets of developed countries. Commitment Four should have called for the elimination of such tariffs.

### ***Subsidised Exports***

The document speaks of the need to reduce subsidies on food exports in conformity with the Uruguay Round Agreement. That sounds okay. However, this formulation does not go far enough to protect livestock farmers in Namibia and South Africa at this time, whose local markets are being destroyed by EU subsidised beef exports. What the EU is doing here is in fact in conformity with the Uruguay Round. It is definitely not in conformity with food security.

NGOs see it as important that the EU and developed countries in general reduce and eventually eliminate export subsidies where these are shown to harm agricultural development in developing countries. The right of developing countries to take protective measures against subsidised food exports should be acknowledged in international law, as was suggested in an earlier draft of the Summit Plan of Action but deleted in later drafts.

### ***Compensation***

In order to offset the negative effects of the Uruguay Round Agreement on net food-importing developing countries, a special ministerial decision was signed at Marrakesh in 1994. The 'Marrakesh Decision' commits developed countries to compensating developing countries which incur losses as a result of higher world food prices or reduced availability of food aid arising from the implementation of the Uruguay Round. Commitment Four reiterates this undertaking, something that is positive. However, we must ask if such written undertakings are being translated into practice. In 1995/96 world cereal stocks fell to their lowest level for 20 years and world cereal prices more than doubled. As a result, according to the FAO, net food-importing developing countries have incurred

additional losses of up to \$4 billion. These countries requested the compensation promised to them at Marrakesh. But to date developed countries have said that the additional costs to these countries are not due to the Uruguay Round but to other factors such as bad weather and reforms of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. So in practice no compensation has been forthcoming, and food insecurity in these countries has increased. NGOs argue that the Marrakesh Decision should now be implemented. The best way to do this is to provide a balanced package of assistance that will help net food-importing developing countries to adapt to the changing international trading environment. In particular, the provision of technical and financial resources to improve domestic and regional agricultural production is important.

### ***Trade and the Environment***

In Commitment Four there is a call for trade and environment policies to be mutually supportive. However, in the light of the deterioration of the natural base for agriculture (overfishing, deforestation, etc.), this formulation is far too weak. Commitment Four should have advocated fair and stable prices for developing countries' commodities, reflecting their real social and ecological value. At the same time, it should have discouraged the gaining of trade advantages at the expense of the environment and basic social and labour standards. NGOs are well aware that social and environmental trade clauses can be abused to conceal protectionist motives. They therefore argue that regulation in this area needs to be agreed multilaterally, introduced progressively and supported with adequate financial and technical backing for countries that will find it difficult initially to comply.

### ***World Trade Organisation***

Commitment Four refers many of its recommendations on trade and food security to the World Trade Organisation. A disadvantage in this is that the WTO likes to operate behind closed doors when making important decisions on world trade. NGOs attending the Summit demanded access for civil society to the negotiations of the WTO, starting with the Ministerial Meeting in Singapore next month. They also believe that the more transparent FAO should be accorded a stronger role in the area of agricultural trade.

## **Commitment Six — Investment in Food Security**

The Plan of Action points to the neglect of agricultural and rural development as reflected in the sectorial priorities and resource allocations of individual countries and the international community. The earlier drafts gave precise figures — probably omitted in later drafts to save embarrassment. The amount of ODA invested in agriculture fell from US\$ 13.4 billion in 1988 to less than US\$ 10 in 1993 and is a diminishing share of total investment. There is clearly a gap between aspirations and reality in the area of public investment. The gap will only be bridged if there is honest critique of the underlying causes of the falling investment: the diversion of development aid to meet growing humanitarian needs and to debt servicing, falling commodity prices and insecure land tenure. Such an essential critique is absent from Commitment Six.

Earlier drafts indicated specific investment targets, for example, “to raise annual investment in agriculture and related food production activities in developing countries to some 30 per cent above present levels by the year 2010”. These targets are removed from the Final Draft, which is a further indication of the unwillingness of world leaders to pay what it will cost to enable the hungry to feed themselves.

Indeed, NGOs discovered early on in the negotiations on the Plan of Action that developed countries had decided they would make no *new* financial resources available to fight hunger. Thus the phrase, “optimise the utilisation of available resources” was the key phrase in earlier drafts of Commitment Six. The disappearance of this phrase in the Final Draft is perhaps an indication of a change of mind on this.

The issue of debt relief is hardly mentioned in Commitment Six. In his address that opened the Summit meeting, Pope John Paul II repeated his call for “reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations” (n.7). It is indeed important that the scarce funds of developing countries be allocated not to paying a foreign debt that by the World Bank’s and IMF’s own definition is unsustainable, but be allocated instead to supporting small farmers and poor urban consumers, to primary health care and education.

Commitment Six re-affirms the need for Governments to reach the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for development assistance. This is welcome,

particularly in the light of the recent cuts in aid budgets of the EU, the U.S. and other developed regions.

This section also contains a welcome commitment to target investment to small-scale food producers, especially women, and their organisations, and to support for food security programmes designed by them.

## **Commitment Seven — Implementation of the Plan of Action**

After Trade (Commitment Four), how to implement the Plan of Action was perhaps the next most contentious issue for negotiators.

### ***National Action Plans***

The reference in earlier texts to ‘establishing and implementing national action plans for improved food security’ was changed to ‘adopt actions within each country’s national framework to enhance food security’. The weakening of resolve conveyed by this change of wording is regrettable, giving the key role of national action plans in implementing the commitments of the World Food Summit.

### ***Responsibility for Implementation of the Plan of Action***

With respect to the important issue of responsibility for implementation of the Plan of Action, this section was in fact strengthened rather than weakened as negotiations proceeded. UN bodies are given precedence over the Bretton Woods Institutions. In the latter, the rich and powerful have the most say, whereas in UN bodies there is at least the principle of one-country-one-vote. For all their weaknesses, there is also more accountability and more participation of civil society in the UN bodies.

### ***Participation of Civil Society***

Commitment Seven (and other Commitments in the Plan of Action) refers to the important role of civil society — NGOs, industry, etc. — in promoting food security. This reference is very welcome. Democratic control of the food system, apart from being the best guarantee of respect for people’s fundamental human right to food, is the ultimate test of democracy itself.

NGOs around the world make an important contribution to promoting food security. And they have made a strong input into the Summit process itself. However, a world of difference is to be noted between the Declaration of the NGO Forum communicated to the official Summit on Sunday, 17 November 1996, and the official Summit Plan of Action. This indicates a dangerous chasm between governments and civil society. Governments need to be aware that NGOs will resist being taken for granted by them and being used merely as implementers of their Plan of Action.

During the week of the Summit, NGO representatives had great difficulty in gaining access to their country delegations attending the official Summit. Reasons of security were mentioned, but there must be something wrong if governments have to be protected from their people. What happened at the Summit contrasts with the constant interaction between government representatives and NGOs in the earlier stages of the Summit process.

### *The Right to Food*

NGOs are happy to see the Right to Food recognised in the Commitment Seven, including the appropriate reference to Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Hopefully, this recognition of food as a basic human right will strengthen national and international resolve to address situations of hunger and malnutrition, especially since governments that have signed the International Covenant are required to report periodically on their performance to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Geneva.

There was some resistance on the part of Northern Governments to acknowledging a right to food, as it can be used as the basis for calling into question the legitimacy of certain clauses in the Uruguay Round, structural adjustment programmes, and more directly the food embargoes imposed on Cuba and Iraq. But then Northern Governments realised that they could not logically argue for the inclusion of human rights and good governance under Commitment One and at the same time argue for the exclusion of the very basic human right to food from Commitment Seven.

Commitment Seven contains the weak but interesting phrase, "formulating voluntary guidelines for food security for all". As NGOs we lobbied governments at the Summit last week to accept a Code of

Conduct on the Right to Food, which would set out good practice for governments, international financial institutions, transnational corporations and NGOs themselves in this whole area. This is a key area of follow-up for NGOs in the months (and maybe years) ahead.

## CONCLUSIONS

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy said, "We have the means, we have the capacity to wipe hunger and poverty from the face of the earth in our life-time... We need only the will". My experience of the World Food Summit, including the preparatory process, leads me to the conclusion that the "will" is still lacking to allocate the available "capacity" and "means" to eliminate hunger and poverty in our world.

I have indicated in my presentation how the ongoing negotiations weakened rather than strengthened the text of the Plan of Action — something that may be understandable in the context of the complexities of international negotiations but is regrettable in view of the terrible suffering of over 800 million people.

The prescriptions of the Bretton Woods Institutions greatly reduced the room for play of the negotiators. Accordingly, the Plan of Action puts the needs of free markets before the needs of hungry people. This in effect has meant that the self-interest of developed countries has won the day.

Can we, nevertheless, look on the World Food Summit as a source of hope for the hungry? I believe we can for a number of reasons:

Firstly, it was not just a World Food *Conference* but a World Food *Summit*. The mere fact of it being a meeting of Heads of Government is likely to increase public and political pressure for a solution to the problem of world hunger.

Secondly, the Plan of Action contains a number of valuable commitments on poverty-orientation, sustainable agriculture and other aspects of food security which I referred to in my presentation.

Thirdly, Commitment Seven emphasises the importance of including civil society in the follow-up to the Summit and implementing of the Plan of Action. During the Summit, NGOs in the European Union arranged a meeting between themselves, representatives of the Irish Presidency of the EU,

officials from the EU Commission (agriculture and development co-operation) and government officials from EU member states. A number of concrete proposals for follow-up were discussed — something which I see as a sign of hope, especially given the diversity of interests involved. It is quite likely that similar kinds of follow-up are being arranged in other Regions of the world.

Fourthly, civil society was strongly represented in the Hunger Gathering, the NGO Forum and at the official Summit itself. I was very much encouraged by the display of energy, creativity and enthusiasm evident among the representatives of civil society in Rome last week — among them some religious and missionaries. These people and their organisations are not waiting for governments to tell them what to do. They are taking the initiative into their own hands, and therein lies real hope for the hungry of this world.

### **Lessons for Religious and Missionaries**

Clearly, the primary contribution of religious and missionaries to the fight against hunger is not in attending Summit meetings but in practising active solidarity towards hungry people on the ground, that is, in farmers' fields, rural and urban communities, schools and hospitals. Religious and missionaries can be proud of their impressive record of commitment to feeding the hungry in many parts of the world.

This is not to say that religious and missionaries have done a perfect job. For example, their contribution in the area of agriculture has been much weaker than in the areas of health and education (which, however, themselves make an essential contribution to food security, as recognised in the Summit's Plan of Action). Training of religious and missionaries in agricultural development lags behind training in education and health care. A further weakness is that the very good work they have done and are still doing in this area is rarely documented.

Besides active solidarity with the hungry at grass-roots level, religious and missionaries should also seek to influence the policies of the economic and political decision-makers in a way that will promote food security. At present, the priorities of the key policy makers in our world include free trade and structural adjustment — priorities which often increase food insecurity. We need to be present in the struggle to change those priorities — putting food for all before profits for the few. This is the task

of social advocacy. More religious and missionaries need to get involved in this work, and Congregations need to allocate more people and resources to this essential activity. What is required of us is not so much agricultural expertise as to act as channels through which the voice of the hungry themselves can be heard in national and international fora. With a foot in both worlds, we can ensure that policies to address world hunger are not based simply on statistical calculations but on the real needs and capacities of hungry people themselves — people whose names and faces we know intimately. This is the contribution we can make to breaking the terrible silence that hangs over world hunger today. In the final analysis, hunger is a moral problem — it concerns the suffering of millions of our fellow human beings, and what *we*, religious and missionaries, have to say is important.