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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

ON

**THE EUROPEAN UNION'S PRIORITIES
FOR THE WORLD FOOD SUMMIT
STAGED BY THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

Rome, November 1996

Commission Communication

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S PRIORITIES FOR THE WORLD FOOD SUMMIT STAGED BY THE FAO (Rome, November 1996)

There are three reasons why the European Union should play an active part in the FAO-convened World Food Summit in Rome (13 to 17 November) which will bring together Heads of State and Government to address the issue of food security: first, the importance of food security for mankind as a whole now and in the future; second, the EU's global role as a major producer, net importer and exporter of farm products and as the world's principal food aid donor; third, the European Community's status as a member of the FAO.

If the EU is to make its mark, both on the content of the policy statement to be signed by Heads of State and Government and, for the Community, by the President of the Council and by the President of the European Commission, and on the operational recommendations spelt out in the Plan of Action, it is crucial that it sets itself clear objectives and ranks them in order of priority.

With that end in view, we need to map out the terms in which the issue of food security worldwide is and will be framed so that the guidelines worked out are not skewed in the wrong direction and so that we set clear goals enabling our ideas to be reflected in the draft negotiating texts and disseminated widely among our partners - be they developing or industrialized countries, European or southern world NGOs - and, of course, through the media.

1. The goal: to ensure all human beings have an adequate diet by affording them effective, lasting and fair access to food

Around 800 million people in the world - almost one person in every seven - face hunger or severe malnutrition at a time when the world is producing enough food to feed all the planet's six billion inhabitants. In the years ahead, given a steadily growing population and limitations in natural resources, a major effort is called for to secure the long-term sustainability of food supplies for human consumption through a combination of suitable development policies, scientific research and technological innovation. But access to available food will remain the key problem unless countries racked by undernourishment and malnutrition take the necessary steps to improve the situation on this front, with a helping hand from the international community. Competitive markets - both domestic and international - play a key role in food supply, and civil society also has a crucial contribution to make in this area.

Three main problems stand in the way of effective and fair access to food:

- (a) **poverty** - particularly in places where it results from extreme inequality in access to land, credit and education (notably for women) and in a dearth of productive jobs - prevents people from producing themselves the food they need or from buying it from available supplies;
- (b) **violence**: civil wars, social unrest, ethnic, religious and regional conflicts interfere with the production of food and its distribution to where it is needed;

- (c) **damage to the environment**, due to inappropriate production methods caused by a lack of tools, equipment or scientific and technological know-how, or by misguided agricultural policies, jeopardizes long-term sustainability, particularly in the most vulnerable regions where poverty is most prevalent.

These problems can be addressed at various levels:

- (1) To begin with, it is for the countries affected by a lack of food security to take the measures needed to tackle the problem at source:

. by striving to create the necessary fundamental conditions : peace, Human Rights, democracy - including equality between the sexes - as well as good governance;

. by adopting sustainable development strategies focusing on those in need and aimed first and foremost at eradicating poverty; such strategies will be based on sound macroeconomic policies which foster savings and investment, and on social and structural policies both general - credit institutions, health, education, infrastructure - and specific - farm reform, gearing of production to market mechanisms and trends, transport and storage infrastructure, training for producers of basic foodstuffs, research, and dissemination of know-how, focusing particularly on the protection of ecosystems;

. by fostering the creation of decently paid jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors so that families can buy for themselves on local markets the food they need.

- (2) The industrialized countries have a role to play by adjusting their own production, in a balanced fashion, to the needs of the environment (protection of natural resources and the countryside), to the constraints of international competition based on natural comparative advantages, and to their own food security requirements.

Their efforts in research, in technological innovation and, in particular, in scientific cooperation with developing countries, will be invaluable in increasing the capacity for sustainable food production at a global level. This work should therefore be continued and fostered.

Finally, it is up to industrialized countries to make a direct contribution to the food security of the poorest countries by opening up markets - a concept which includes capital movements in the shape of direct investment in the developing countries - and by providing aid.

- (3) In addition to the application of the Uruguay Round agreements in all sectors, including agricultural markets, and GATT-sponsored measures to stabilize those markets, international and regional cooperation should focus as a matter of priority on support for sustainable development strategies in countries which genuinely translate them into practice, channelling the bulk of aid to the least advanced countries.

Emergency food aid remains a priority. However, the emphasis must be placed on restoring production and distribution systems in the immediate wake of a serious crisis, while the goal of food aid should more than ever be to bolster the recipient country's agricultural development and agri-food policies. Triangular operations between donor countries, developing country food suppliers and developing country recipients, along with the monetisation of food aid and judicious use of the counterpart funds thus generated for food security purposes, are proving to be particularly useful instruments in this regard.

Developing countries should integrate food aid into policies aimed at enhancing their food security. Food aid should become a genuine development instrument, notably through the implementation of strategies designed to combat poverty and ultimately to make food aid superfluous. Coordination between food security and food aid programmes should be strengthened, among other things through the adoption by donors of a code of conduct for food aid. The EU and the Member States have already made a start on improving their own coordination in this area.

2. The EU's priority objectives

- (1) To get the developing countries to recognise their primary responsibility for improving access to food, by promoting sustainable production where it is inadequate, but above all by increasing the food purchasing power of the poorest sections of the population by policies aimed at the elimination of poverty and reduction in inequality.
- (2) To highlight the importance for food security of strengthening or restoring peace and domestic stability by rooting them in democracy, good governance and the observance of human rights.
- (3) To insist on sound domestic policies: macroeconomic stability, competitive markets for products and factors such as credit and agricultural inputs, access to land and other productive resources, social and health policies targeted in particular at women and children (education, health - including nutritional hygiene and family planning), recognition of the role of civil society.
- (4) To ensure effective and correct implementation of the Uruguay Round agreements, including the Marrakesh decision on measures relating to the possible adverse effects of the reform programme on the least advanced countries and on developing countries which are net importers of food products; to help stabilize agricultural markets through measures compatible with GATT.
- (5) To promote research in the food sector so as to be able to offer wholesome food products with optimum nutritional value that will enhance human health.

To encourage agricultural research and the dissemination of technological innovation through scientific cooperation between industrialized and developing countries, in order to push back the frontiers of sustainable production through more efficient use of natural resources (land, water and biodiversity) and of ecosystems, while underscoring the need to respect the environment and protect biodiversity.

- (6) To implement as speedily as possible the measures set out in the Kyoto Declaration and the plan of action on the contribution of fisheries to food security.
 - (7) To channel available aid towards the poorest countries, stepping it up where possible, in order to encourage them to implement convincing sustainable development strategies; to continue to relieve the public debt of the most indebted among the poorest countries in line with G7 proposals to the international financial institutions, which will deliberate on this matter in Washington in the autumn.
 - (8) Food aid remains essential in emergencies, but should as soon as possible aim to promote rehabilitation; food aid operations cannot provide a lasting solution unless they are part and parcel of development schemes aimed at reviving local production and trade.
- Food aid cannot be a substitute for failed agricultural development and agri-food policies, rather it should mesh with those policies and bolster them.

- Food aid should be supplied in a flexible manner so that it takes better account of specific local or national situations (potential and conditions). Purchase of supplies locally or from a neighbouring country, monetisation of food aid, financial assistance or even access to hard currency to encourage the domestic private sector to become more involved in importing food products, and close integration of food aid operations into development assistance, should be seen as a single operation.
- (9) Through regional cooperation and better integration of neighbouring countries' markets it will be possible to turn natural complementarities to good account and provide an effective way of helping achieve food security objectives in the countries concerned. The EU supports this approach and would encourage other donors to follow suit.

Conclusions

1. The European Union must above all seek to ensure that the World Food Summit follows on logically from the big UN human development conferences (Rio 1992, on Environment; Vienna 1993, on Human Rights; Cairo 1994, on Population; Copenhagen 1995, on Social Development; Beijing 1995, on Women; Istanbul 1996, Habitat II) and builds on their results without undermining the progress already made, notably on human rights, equality of the sexes, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty.

2. Food security policy should be one of the main elements of the drive to eliminate poverty. Its realisation depends above all on sustainable and equitable development strategies. The solution to the problem of food security does not lie primarily in increasing global agricultural production, nor in a liberalization of global food markets going, in the short term, beyond the Uruguay Round agreements, which should of course be implemented effectively and fairly; rather, it requires effective development strategies aimed at the reduction of inequality and the elimination of poverty.

3. There should be no need to expand the FAO's brief after the Summit; the job of overseeing the implementation of the Plan of Action is a matter for ECOSOC as part of the overall follow-up to the big UN conferences. On the other hand, it is essential that the FAO - in carrying out its remit - should overhaul its action programmes to attune them more closely to the approach outlined in the Policy Declaration and Plan of Action to be endorsed in Rome on 13 and 14 November.

Consequently:

The Commission has drawn up this communication which reiterates guiding principles for the Community's and the Member States' participation in the Summit's deliberations.