

FAO /World Food Day stresses climate change and bioenergy effects on poor / The poor will suffer most



Climate change and bioenergy were the focus of the 2008 World Food Day activities, which involved over 150 countries. FAO celebrates World Food Day each year on 16 October, the day on which the Organization was founded in 1945.

*"Global warming is already underway and adaptation strategies are now a matter of urgency, especially for the most vulnerable poor countries. Hundreds of millions of small-scale farmers, fishers and forest-dependent people will be worst hit by climate change. Adaptation strategies, especially for the most vulnerable poor countries, where most of the over 920 million hungry people live, need to be urgently developed, reviewing land use plans, food security programmes, fisheries and forestry policies to protect the poor from climate change,"* said Alexander Mueller, FAO Assistant Director-General for Natural Resources Management and Environment Department.

The FAO Committee on World Food Security, with representatives from more than 100 countries and a number of civil society organizations, met in Rome (14-17 October 2008) to assess trends in the world food security and nutrition situation. The First Lady of Egypt, Suzanne Mubarak, was the keynote speaker at the World Food Day Ceremony in Rome, 16 October.

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton who heads an international non-governmental organization bearing his name participated in a World Food Day ceremony at the United Nations in New York on 23 October. He urged the international community to stop using the global financial crisis *"as an excuse"* to avoid dealing with escalating hunger, adding that over the long term, only agricultural self-sufficiency could take a significant bite out of world hunger and stave off future financial woes. He added: *"Food is not a commodity like others... We should go back to a policy of maximum agricultural self-sufficiency ... While there would always be a global market for crops like rice, wheat and corn, it is crazy for us to think we can develop a lot of these countries where I work without increasing their capacity to feed themselves and treating food like it was a colour television set."* FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf also warned of broader social consequences if hunger is left unchecked. *'The widening gap between fabulous wealth and abject poverty has pushed many dispossessed and desperate people to exile, overseas or intra-continental, in search of the promised land. Faced with immigration, some wealthy have barricaded themselves in their fortresses. But how can massive exodus be prevented other than through economic growth and especially agricultural development, given that 70 percent of the poor live in rural areas?'*

Major World Food Day events were planned in Albania, Egypt, Morocco, South Korea and a number of Asian and Latin American countries during October. A third edition of the popular Run for Food took place in Rome on 19 October involving over 4 000 people with a similar event to be held simultaneously in Milan. Among other activities, the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry held a WFD seminar in Stockholm on 16 October. The same day, in Brussels, a joint conference on the food crisis took place between the EU Agricultural Information Centre and the European Parliament Development Commission and FAO. Also on World Food Day, Ireland's Freedom from Hunger Council organized a seminar in Dublin. Similar events were planned throughout Italy. In Spain, the annual WFD Telefood gala took place on 8 November over a period of seven hours. In Egypt and in the Gulf Countries, as

well as in Africa, Asia and Latin America, WFD/TeleFood activities and events are planned to raise awareness and funds for TeleFood fighting hunger projects. People living in arid and semi-arid areas are the main and first victims of food crisis. If properly heard, these generous calls can only push the international community to improve the situation in these areas, which means combating desertification among others.

*Gérard BEGNI, Chairman, EDN Science/policy Interface WG and Béatrice ROY, Mediterranean Science Area – From various sources, chiefly FAO Website.*