

## **Meeting Rivers Series - 5**

### **STATEMENT BY CHRISTIAN, FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, AND OTHER NGO'S TO 'THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY AND THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIOENERGY'.**

*Rome 3-5 June 2008*

#### **Foreword**

1. In the light of climate change, concern about future energy supplies, an unprecedented rise in the price of cereals, and the ensuing food riots in several parts of the world, the 'signs of the times' indicate the need for the international community to act with urgency.

Every faith tradition invites us both to feed the hungry and care for our environment and its myriad life forms. As people of faith, we recognize the moral imperative without exception to change our lifestyle in keeping with the carrying capacity of the earth and the protection of its climate. We also recognize the need to ensure that policies enacted by elected representatives and relevant international organizations contribute to an improved quality of life for every human person, each made in the image and likeness of God, and to the sustainability of ecosystems on which every living creature depends.

We believe that the challenges to be addressed at this conference present a huge opportunity to build a new human society, rooted in our loving reverence for and responsible stewardship of all Creation.

#### **Human Rights**

2. The undersigned are encouraged by the recent and timely request by the UN Human Rights Council (March 26, 2008) to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to conduct a consultative study on the relationship between climate change and human rights.

3. We share the growing widespread concern that the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger by half will not be met. With rising costs of staple cereals and increasing world hunger, orientations from the 'High-Level Conference on World Food Security and the Challenge of Climate Change and Bioenergy' will be more important and more scrutinized than ever.

4. The International Community and, particularly, those suffering the consequences of food shortages, will not only want to see greater solidarity through programmes to alleviate the immediate effects of hunger, but will be anxious for the underlying causes (an unfair world trade system, social and environmental problems caused by the 'green revolution', climate change, unsustainable farming practices, agro-fuel policies, speculation, waste, etc.) to be effectively tackled, thus ensuring the availability of sufficient sustainably grown food for everyone's basic needs into the future – a future where the continuing impact of climate change on agro-ecosystems will present an unprecedented and enduring long-term challenge. We share the concerns of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food in his call to implement the human right to food and we agree that only a 'normative approach' can gradually eliminate hunger.

## **Climate Change**

5. The undersigned strongly endorse the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) IV Assessment Report, notably that climate change is predominantly human-induced, principally caused by the unsustainable consumption patterns of wealthy countries, now ever more extensively imitated by upper income groups across the developing world.

## **Transgenics**

6. Local communities must be fully involved in choices and decisions regarding fishing, food and land policies. We advocate the full mobilization of traditional knowledge systems, combined with insights of modern science, and a fully precautionary approach to transgenic plant and animal breeding techniques in order to safeguard the integrity of creation, and the wellbeing of present and future generations of the human family. There is a moral imperative to feed the hungry, but none to use transgenic biotechnology when less contested and well-tested alternatives can deliver comparable results in the medium and long-term. All that is technically possible is not necessarily good for the person or society. Under no circumstances should patents as they have been addressed in the agreement on 'Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights' (TRIPS) restrict farmers' free exchange of seeds and hinder their innovations. Plants, seeds and genes are part of creation which cannot be claimed by intellectual property rights.

## **Right to Food, Empowerment of local communities and of Women**

7. We support proactive approaches inspired by 'food sovereignty' and the 'primary right to food', a questioning of the current conventional or mainstream agriculture, empowering developing country small farmers, and encouraging local and regional markets, with a greater focus on bioregions. The FAO can greatly enhance its work in bringing traditional and scientific knowledge together in the face of new challenges posed by climate change. This conference can outline the sustainable strategies needed to create a 'new paradigm' which would build on the ideas advocated by NGOs and civil society in recent decades to deliver sustainable food security rooted in fulfilling the potential of small farmers in developing countries. Access to property rights, to water and energy services, financing and micro-credits are fundamental to guarantee the existence of small farmers, especially women.

We cannot accept proposals involving the eventual removal of at least one billion small farmers in developing countries to towns, leaving future food production predominantly in the hands of large agro-industrial enterprises. We reiterate our deepest conviction that policies to overcome climate change and hunger must respect and promote the well-being of the rural family and especially of women and recognise rural people's irreplaceable role in the conservation of soil and rural ecosystems, species and related traditional knowledge.

We urge the full implementation of gender-equitable policies as a cross-cutting commitment, since in most developing countries women are the guarantors of food security. Gender-sensitive policies must also be implemented in international long-term and emergency humanitarian (food) aid.

## **Biofuels**

8. We support the United Nations Secretary-General's on-going review of the sustainability aspects of biofuels production. Rather than searching to replenish diminishing fossil fuel energy supplies at all costs, efforts need to go into restructuring our society to use less energy and resources, an approach equally applicable to food production techniques.

## **Transport**

9. As an alternative to large-scale biofuels development, we advise visionary policies to reduce transport demand, as well as to shift freight/passenger traffic to non-fossil fuel based systems. FAO needs to continue to examine the economic, social and environmental impacts of 1st and 2nd generation biofuels. The negative implications of large-scale biofuels production on food security and biodiversity give rise to deep concern.

## **Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development**

10. We advise caution against 'short-term' solutions. A clear focus, respecting the integrity of creation, must be kept on eliminating poverty and unjust social structures, the root causes of hunger, through a multiple options approach. We encourage a model of sustainable agriculture and rural development; raising public awareness of the importance of family agriculture; studying the impact of biofuels on the environment; raising concern on extractive industries and their indiscriminate and wasteful use of resources with a high negative impact on environmental and local conditions. In this context, we note with great interest many of the recommendations and analyses of the recently published International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development and share in the general welcome extended to it by civil society organisations.

## **Education**

11. Information alone will not bring about the paradigm shift needed if the climate change challenge is to be successfully tackled. Both farmers and consumers need to be educated to value nature's intrinsic worth as a gift of God, rather than to consider her a 'resource to be exploited'. Special attention should be paid to the information and education of women as they are not only responsible for household nutrition, management of local ecosystems and are also the following generation's teachers. Informed consumer choices towards small-scale farming and local food production need to be part of the solution. Educational syllabuses at every level, but particularly for youth, must include teachings on values that promote a simple lifestyle and on principles of sustainability, particularly on how the human economy is absolutely dependent on nature's economy.

## **Policies: Coherence and Implementation**

12. We call for more coherence between international UN and non-UN bodies and the cross-cutting implementation of Human Rights. Enacting Conventions to defend and promote human rights, particularly of the poor, reverential and respectful of the carrying capacity of the Earth, is insufficient in itself. International bodies must ensure that appropriate additional protocols are signed and implemented within national laws and policies. International monitoring should guarantee that these laws are applied.

### **Civil Society Participation**

13. We call on this Conference to launch an effective, long-term multi-stakeholder process of discussion and action, at national, regional and international levels in which civil society, including faith organizations, will play a full role. We are concerned that the voice of 'civil society', especially the most important stakeholders, does not appear to have been sufficiently engaged in the run-up to this conference. We are aware of a recent letter from the IPC to the Director General of the FAO, stating that the FAO was disregarding its own experience of interaction with civil society organizations acquired over the past 15 years. For future conferences and their resulting actions, we respectfully petition full consultation regarding the design of the programme and participation by civil society.

*Rome, 24.04.08*