



**Address by the FAO Director-General  
on the occasion of the World Food Day Celebration and the  
Launch of the International Year of the Potato**

*United Nations, New York, 18 October 2007*

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*H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly,*

*H.E. Mr. Léo Méroès, Vice-President of ECOSOC,*

*H.E. Ismael Benavides, Minister of Agriculture of Peru,*

*Ms. Rachel Mayanja, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General,*

*H.E. James Godfrey, Chairman of the Board, International Potato Center,*

*Ms. Gabrielle Loneck,*

*Excellencies,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We have chosen *The Right to Food* as the theme for this year's World Food Day because we want a more equitable world.

Our planet produces enough food to feed its entire population. Yet, tonight, 854 million women, men and children will be going to sleep on an empty stomach. The World Food Day is dedicated to them. We must place the human being at the center of our attention, our policies and our actions.

The right to food, which is the theme of this year's World Food Day, is formally recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which the United Nations adopted in 1948.

Since then, this commitment has been gradually strengthened. In 1996, at the World Food Summit, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed the right to food and pledged "to give particular attention to implementation and full and progressive realization of this right as a means of achieving food security for all".

At the international level, in 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognized the right to adequate food and "the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger". The covenant came into force in 1976 and is legally binding on the 156 countries that have ratified it.

The covenant's signatory states undertook to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food. *Respect* by refraining from taking measures that might deprive individuals of their right to food, for example confiscating land or deviating watercourses used for agriculture, without justification and without adequate compensation. *Protect* by ensuring individuals are not deprived of their access to food by third parties; for example, either ensuring that permits for industrial activities such as forestry operations, do not impede access to food or livelihoods. *Fulfill* by facilitating actions and pursuing policies that will contribute to the gradual realization of the right to food. And all those individuals who, for reasons beyond their control, are unable to meet their needs, must be provided with food or the means to procure food.

In 1999, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which is responsible for monitoring implementation of the covenant, defined the content of the right to food. The right to food exists "when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement".

The right to food features in other international treaties and instruments, notably in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It was to promote the realization of these international commitments that, in 2004, the FAO Council adopted the *Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security*.

The guidelines represent a step forward in the integration of human rights in the work of food and agriculture bodies, such as FAO, thus reflecting the UN Secretary-General's appeal for reform of the United Nations. This means that the right to food has to be implemented to fight hunger and poverty and to hasten achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

*Mr President,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

For many countries, applying the right to food remains a major challenge. Yet, such action is possible in the long term. We need to identify the populations that are hungry, to develop strategies and regulations for food security, to allocate roles and responsibilities, to put in place a legislative framework and to provide mechanisms for seeking redress.

But there is an incalculable cost to neglecting the right to food. What is the life-long impact of a child's nutrition deficiency? How many lost school years, how many visits to doctors and hospitals that could be avoided, how many wasted opportunities for gainful employment as an adult? These questions are rarely asked, yet hunger has a huge cost to health, education and employment systems.

A right is not a right if it cannot be claimed. The existence and proper functioning of recourse mechanisms are essential for the realization of the right to food. A small number of legal actions and judicial decisions have helped to develop this right and reinforce government action.

National commitments to implementation of the right to food would have been unthinkable only ten years ago, yet such commitments are already bearing modest fruit.

While the right to food is the responsibility of each country, globalization emphasizes the international dimension of the action to be taken.

In this connection, we need to pay tribute to the influential work of Mr Jean Ziegler, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, whose studies and reports engendered many national processes for the realization of this right. The creation of the Human Rights Council and the strengthening of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, decided by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, are important landmarks for the right to food.

Ensuring each human being has an adequate and regular supply of food is not just a moral imperative and sound economic investment; it is the realization of a basic, universal and inalienable human right.

The world has the means to fulfil the right to food. Now is the time to make it happen.

Acting for the right to food and acting to promote the staple foods needed for a balanced diet are also reasons for my presence in New York at the launch of the International Year of the Potato. The year 2008 will be honouring this staple food.

This International Year will provide greater insight into the potato's long history and its current contribution to global food security, rural employment and people's welfare.

The potato has been eaten for more than 7 000 years. From its origin in the Andes of South America, in particular Peru, it now ranks fourth among the world's food crops. It is also the world's most important non-cereal crop, with an annual production of some 315 million tonnes, half in the developing countries.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We can achieve the Millennium Development Goals by acting on all fronts.

A strong mobilization of everyone is necessary to realize these goals. If many countries face major problems, others realize important developments.

The fight against hunger in the world is a difficult battle, but together we can overcome.

Thank you.