



**Twenty-First Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly
on the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International
Conference on Population and Development**

As WRITTEN

(New York, 30 June – 2 July 1999)

*Statement on behalf of the
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

Mr/Mrs Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address this distinguished audience on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This meeting will surely give a new impetus to global population and development initiatives, and reinforce the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. This will, in turn, create a positive synergy with the World Food Summit Plan of Action.

FAO's field of action touches upon the most basic of human needs and rights – that of access to **adequate** food – and therefore population issues have been, whether implicitly or explicitly, at the core of FAO's mandate since its inception 54 years ago. In the process, we have gained considerable experience and insights.

In the **aftermath** of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo five years ago, the integration of a wider population and development perspective into FAO's policies-and activities has **become** a major concern. At the 1996 World Food Summit (**WFS**) – the first global gathering of leaders at the highest political level to focus on food security – the commitment of the international community to achieve the goal of ensuring adequate food for all people was renewed. Several population issues associated with sustainable agriculture and rural development, especially population growth, had been highlighted already in the technical background documentation prepared for the WFS. The need to respond adequately to population challenges was subsequently stressed in the WFS Plan of Action. The WFS culminated in the Rome Declaration on World Food Security in which member states expressed their political will to eradicate hunger and achieve food security for all, with a target of halving the current number of undernourished people no later than 2015.

If the global target set by the WFS is to be met, major efforts will have to be made, especially by, or on behalf of, those countries where the problems are greatest. Generally, these are

countries with a high incidence of chronic undernutrition, but they **also** include countries and regions experiencing high rates of population growth, migration from rural areas, and environmental degradation – three important causes of food insecurity. A good understanding of the linkages between demographic dynamics, rural development, agricultural production and environmental change is therefore crucial to FAO's work. As part of the ongoing process of defining our long-term strategic objectives, population-related themes have been increasingly incorporated into FAO's work plans. Topics such as shifts in the age structure of rural populations, rural-urban population movements, linkages between population change and natural resources management, and gender aspects of food security have been identified as some of FAO's priorities.

One of FAO's most important duties is to assist countries in policy formulation. We are well aware that policies to address the issue of food insecurity and to promote sustainable livelihoods cannot work unless they include gender-responsive, participatory approaches to population issues. Within the sphere of our own mandate and in cooperation with other partners, we now put more emphasis than ever before on providing countries with **policy-**relevant advice to help them to follow a sustainable path of both agricultural and demographic development, with the ultimate objective of ensuring enough food for all.

FAO believes that to succeed, population policies must be a central part of an overall development strategy which has food security as one of its main objectives. Experience has taught us that effective solutions can only be found through strengthening multi-sectoral policies and programmes, and through cooperation between those responsible for formulating and implementing such strategic tools. The challenge we must all face in the future is to secure effective collaboration between the various actors and take the action required to free the world from food insecurity and malnutrition, thereby contributing to solving population problems. Such an example of effective collaboration can be found in the UNFPA TSS system in which agencies like FAO work **together** in order to build national capacity to implement the ICPD Programme of Action through a multi-sectoral approach. We hope at FAO that one of the results of this meeting will be greater commitment to implementing developmental strategies that take into account the interactions between population, biophysical environment, and socio-economic, institutional and cultural factors. FAO pledges to play its role in contributing with all concerned – whether public or private, international or national – to the solution of one of the problems haunting humanity for millennia. We **know** that solutions exist and that success is within grasp, but this requires that we all work successfully together and set the right priorities.

Thank you.