

# SAVE FOOD CONGRESS

**Speech Delivered by UNEP Director of Communication Naysan Sahba on behalf of UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner**

## **Feeding the Planet the Sustainable Way!**

*In a world of finite resources we do not need to produce more, but to produce better and consume intelligently*

**Esteemed guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,**

On behalf of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and its Executive Director Mr. Achim Steiner, I am pleased to address this distinguished gathering.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Every day, more than 840 million people go hungry in a world of plenty.

The majority of those suffering from hunger live in developing countries, representing 15 per cent of the populations of these countries. Today, nearly one in four people are hungry across Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa the modest progress achieved in curbing hunger up to 2007 was reversed, with hunger rising 2 per cent per year since then (FAO).

Developed regions also saw a rise in the number of hungry or malnourished people; from 13 million in 2004-2006 to 16 million in 2010-2012.

Faced with the daunting task of feeding close to 10 billion people by 2050, we are challenged to produce more food; putting significant pressure on water, land, oceans and entire ecosystems.

If current population and consumption trends continue, humanity will need the equivalent of two Earths to support itself by 2030 (Global Footprint Network, 2012).

But the fact of the matter is, the reason the numbers of the hungry are on the increase is not because we do not produce enough food.

Research shows that the world produces more food than is actually needed; food that is lost along the supply chain or wasted due to poor consumption decisions.

Both UNEP and FAO have pointed out in recent years that at least one third, or 1.3 billion tonnes, of food produced is wasted – an amount corresponding to over 1.4 billion hectares of crop land.

In January last year, UNEP, FAO and partners – including Messe Düsseldorf — launched the **Think.Eat.Save: Reduce Your Foodprint** campaign in support of FAO's *SAVE FOOD* Initiative and the UN Secretary General's *Zero Hunger Challenge*, in order to raise awareness and encourage action to stop food waste. It was the theme of the World Environment Day in 2013 which catalyzed 2,683 registered food waste prevention activities representing an estimated 1.4 million participants around the world. Wasting food makes no sense economically, environmentally and ethically.

## Food Security for All

Hence, achieving food security is not about increasing global food production, (given) its large impacts on natural systems. It is about creating better food systems, sustainable production and consumption approaches, more efficient policies and smarter investment patterns across relevant sectors.

## Understanding the Food Loss and Waste Challenge

While patterns of food and loss waste may vary considerably between developed and developing regions, the total volume of wastage remains similar. In both the US and Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, food loss and waste is estimated at around 40 per cent of the food produced (UNEP).

The majority of food loss in the developing world occurs across the supply chain: in the field, transport and storage stages.

According to the World Bank, post-harvest losses of maize in East Africa can reach up to 35 per cent. In Asia, the post-harvest loss of rice can reach up to 25 per cent and in China, post-harvest losses of fruits and vegetables are estimated to be up to 46 per cent.

Such losses have direct impact on food security and the wider domestic market in these countries.

In the developed world, waste occurs primarily at the retail and household levels. US losses total 26 per cent of the food supply at the retail and consumer levels only. Losses in the UK total 22 per cent of food bought for household consumption (Hodges et al, 2010).

Food wastage carries direct economic and environmental costs and depletes the natural resources base that underpins food production:

- In the UK, tackling household food waste would reduce the volume of greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere equivalent to taking 20 per cent of cars off UK roads.

- The water and energy embedded in the production of food that is wasted in the US represents 25 per cent of total water use and 4 per cent of total energy use (Hall et al 2009).
- Post-harvest loss in small scale fisheries is generally regarded as being the highest in the food production system. It is caused by poor handling, spoilage and the discarding of by-catch. Spoilage is responsible for an estimated loss of 10 per cent of total global production. The discard of unwanted by-catch produces an additional 20 million tonnes of waste yearly.

This is especially significant in the trawl and gillnet fisheries, where the proportion of species caught incidentally can reach 95 per cent of the total catch (FAO, 2012).

- UNEP research shows that the protein lost from fish by-catch and discard, if harnessed, could provide enough fish meal to increase current aquaculture by 50 per cent.

### Food Consumption and Inequality

People in developed countries, who represent only 18 per cent of the global population, consumed an average of 41 per cent of the global production of animal protein and 30 per cent of grain in 2008 alone, according to FAO studies. Overconsumption in developed countries has direct impacts on global food security.

For example, the inefficient conversion of cereals to animal feed or biofuels is a diversion of food resources. According to the Worldwatch Institute (WRI), the total global grain harvest of 2004, if used directly for human consumption, would feed 6 billion people. If this same amount of grain is used for animal feed, the meat produced would only feed 2.6 billion.

Moreover, overconsumption in developed countries and across more affluent societies drives up food prices, causing more poor people to suffer hunger.

### What drives these trends?

In addition to growing populations and migration to urban areas, increased incomes is an important factor in driving trends that impact food security.

While poverty remains unacceptably high – particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia – the UN reports that the percentage of the population living in households below the poverty line has decreased worldwide since 1990. Additional progress has been made in transitioning low-income households to the ranks of the middle class (UNDESA).

The increase in expendable income has considerable effects on the global consumption of food.

For example, global meat and dairy consumption doubled between 1950 and 2009. If this trend continues, global animal protein consumption will increase by a factor of four by 2050 (Bouwman, 1997).

### The Agro-ecological Resource Base

The increase in consumption of resource-intensive agricultural foodstuffs is directly responsible for the rising pressures on land, water and other natural resources used in food production:

- The global production of food occupies nearly one quarter of all the habitable land on earth.
- It is responsible for more than 70 per cent of freshwater consumption; for 80 per cent of deforestation and is the largest single cause of species and biodiversity loss.
- More than 20 per cent of all cultivated land, 30 per cent of forests and 10 per cent of grasslands are undergoing degradation due to unsustainable agriculture.
- Deforestation, resulting from turning forest into crop land contributes to more than 30 per cent of total global greenhouse gas emissions.
- Globally, the agro-food system accounts for nearly 30 per cent of end-user available energy.
- FAO reports that fish consumption has reached an all time high with the contribution of fish to global diets reaching nearly 17 KG per capita and supplying at least three billion people with 15 per cent of their average animal protein intake. But 75 per cent of the world's major marine fish stocks are either depleted or overexploited.
- Aquaculture, which most often utilizes wild caught fish as feed for farmed species, does not relieve pressure on wild stocks. For example, 20 kg of wild-caught feed is generally required to produce just 1 kg of farmed tuna (FAO, 2011). Global production of fish from aquaculture grew by more than 60 per cent between 2000 and 2008. Today, more than 50 per cent of the world's fish consumption comes from aquaculture.

### The Future

At present, studies suggest that the current unsustainable trends and patterns of food consumption will remain unchanged.

In the next few years, food consumption is expected to increase by around 30 per cent due to population growth, while the effects of climate change are expected to reduce agricultural yields by up to 5 per cent in some areas.

The production of food is entirely dependent upon well-functioning ecosystems in the form of healthy arable land, healthy soils, plentiful water and resilient fisheries.

Unsustainable production and consumption patterns threaten the resilience of life's support systems and limits the expansion potential of cropland, rangeland and fisheries.

To bring about the vision of a truly sustainable world we need to transform the way we produce and consume our natural resources.

The restoration of ecosystems will not only increase the amount of food produced, but will also improve the state of the environment upon which food production is dependent.

Cutting the rate of food loss and waste in half by 2050 would close 20 per cent of the food gap, according to studies by the World Resources Institute (WRI) and UNEP.

Reducing excessive demand for animal products, particularly by developed countries, would spare hundreds of millions of hectares of forests that otherwise would be cleared for grazing.

Farmers can increase crop yields on existing agricultural land by implementing a suite of soil and water management practices such as agroforestry and water harvesting.

Increasing farmers' efficiency levels through capacity building and access to technology can help reduce waste through the supply chain, while improving the livelihood of small-holder farmers.

Identifying innovative ways of safely capturing and concerting food waste to animal feed provides one of the greatest opportunities for improving future food supplies and minimizing the global environmental footprint. Freeing cereals currently used as animal feed for direct human consumption could increase available food calories by as much as 70 per cent, according to UNEP studies.

But how do we create a holistic approach to solving the food waste problem?

As a key product of the Think.Eat.Save campaign, the FAO/UNEP Sustainable Food Systems Programme, as well as the SAVE Food initiative, UNEP is publishing this month a Guidance document that provides **clear and comprehensive steps for governments, businesses and other organisations** to develop strategies, programmes and activities to prevent and reduce food and drink waste and achieve the associated financial savings, reductions in environmental impacts and increased food and nutrition security. This will be **Version 1.0** and it will be updated in the future, as best practices in food waste prevention and reduction continue to be implemented throughout the world. The objective of this Guidance will be to catalyse action around the world by sharing proven methodologies for food waste prevention. My colleague, James Lomax and Dr Richard Swannell from Waste and Resources Action Programme WRAP will be giving you more information about this in the next session today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We need to take immediate action to save food, improve livelihoods and conserve the environment.

Solutions and opportunities exist. But we need to seize the moment and create the needed momentum.

I wish you a successful meeting and look forward to working with you to Save Food now and for the future.