



The President of the Economic and Social Council

Statement of the President of the Economic and Social Council H.E. Dr. Ivan Šimonoviæ, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Croatia at the World Food Day Ceremony, October 18, 2002

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman,

1. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Director-General of FAO for organizing this important event and for inviting me. It gives me great pleasure to address you today as we commemorate World Food Day by focusing on one of the most pertinent issues facing the world today and affecting the livelihoods and well-being of all the world's people: the intrinsic relationship between water and food security.
2. Without water there could be no life on this planet: it is through water that human beings, animals and plants survive and thrive. It is therefore understandable that the competition for water is fierce around the world. Industry, households and ecosystems all compete for this precious resource. Agriculture, too, is a significant source of demand given that water is an essential resource for food production and food security. More precisely, agriculture is the single largest user of water resources, accounting at present for some 70% of freshwater exploitation.
3. Recognizing the vital role water resources play in agricultural production and productivity, the Economic and Social Council through one of its subsidiary bodies - the Commission on Sustainable Development – discussed in depth the topic of “strategic approaches to fresh water management” in its sixth session in 1998. The Commission reaffirmed that water resources are essential for satisfying basic human needs, including food production, and urged Governments to do more to adequately address issues of water, food and poverty eradication in an integrated manner.
4. As demand for water is increasing, water resources are becoming scarcer every year. Many countries are experiencing periodic or even permanent water stress. Quantity issues alone would be challenging enough. Water quality, too, however, has decreased as a result of pollution and degradation.
5. Lack of access to water has put severe constraints on the socio-economic development of many countries and threatens global food security. Often, water scarcity most severely affects poor countries and within countries it has the greatest effect on poor people. The majority of poor people in developing countries live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Some 30% of rural people lack access to safe drinking water and some 640 million poor people living in dry land areas suffer from severe water stress. The development of drought

resistant crops, secure access to water yielding assets for the rural poor and implementation of small scale irrigation schemes are proven policy options which enable the rural poor to overcome their poverty and increase household food security.

6. Water scarcity not only threatens food security but can also become a source of conflict as different social groups and users struggle over access to and usage of a limited resource. Water's potential for civil and political tensions is greatly increased in cases where scarce water resources are not managed in a transparent and participatory manner. Increasing water productivity and improving water management has become an imperative not only for ensuring food security, reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development but also for deflecting social tensions over water. Community based approaches by which user groups together with local governments developed and implemented improved water management plans have shown that local ownership and control over water resources increases water productivity and efficiency while fostering social inclusion.

7. Renewed attention to the interlinkages between the ecological, economic and developmental dimensions of water management and food production has been paid by the United Nations at the recently concluded World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Both water and agriculture have been identified as central issues requiring immediate action and the outcome document adopted by world leaders at the Summit clearly stipulates that integrated water resource managements plans balancing ecological, economic and human requirements need to be developed by 2005. ECOSOC's Commission on Sustainable Development is the main body within the United Nations system tasked with monitoring the implementation of the agreements reached in Johannesburg.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,
Let me conclude.

8. ECOSOC and its subsidiary machinery in partnership with all stakeholders is ready to face the challenge of tackling the complex problem of preserving scarce water resources while increasing agricultural production and productivity to feed the world's people and reduce extreme poverty and hunger among the 1.2 billion people living on less than 1 dollar per day. We look forward to working with all of you towards the achievement of these goals.

Thank you.