

## Message from the Chairperson of CSD-17

Within just one year, the world has been shaken by an unprecedented spike in the costs of basic foods, by hunger riots and by social tensions that have demonstrated that food insecurity is an irrefutable reality. Estimates suggest that the total number of malnourished people worldwide could rise to 967 million in 2008, up from 923 million in 2007. In addition, a large number of developing countries are struggling to address the macroeconomic impacts of high domestic food prices and inflationary pressure, as well as increased import expenditure. The challenge facing Africa is especially serious. Achieving the first Millennium Development Goal therefore remains a major challenge.

It is a new reality to which global warming and declining natural resources are now adding an unprecedented sense of urgency. Ever rising trends in energy consumption are a major concern. Reports show that we are using far more of our natural resources than our planet can regenerate. As a global society we cannot accept increasing levels of poverty and hunger. So, we are faced with one of the toughest challenges in this new millennium.

Agriculture continues to be, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a fundamental sector for sustainable development and poverty reduction. With over 920 million people being food insecure and at the same time having agriculture as the main source of income for most of the world's poor and as the motor for economic development in many rural areas, attention to agriculture and rural development issues in developing countries in terms of policy commitment and investments is crucial. Recent years in several fora a general agreement emerged regarding that message, specifically in the World Development Report 2008 of the World Bank, the State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA) of the Food and Agriculture Organisation and The Challenges of Hunger 2008 by International Food and Policy Research Institute.

The Commission on Sustainable Development, with its focus on the thematic issues of **agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification, and Africa** in its upcoming policy session, will provide a timely platform for Governments, UN, and major groups, including private sector, to reinvigorate their resolve to tackle the global food price crisis, meet the hunger and malnutrition challenge and contribute to the achievement of the MDGs and the Johannesburg targets and commitments.

One thing is clear: we have neglected agriculture too much for many years. At the same time we are confronted with ever rising trends in energy consumption and climate change. These trends are and should be a major concern to us, as they will have a huge impact on our future. We use far more of our natural resources than our planet can regenerate. The world population would reach 9 billion in 2050.

We all have to face these dilemmas, including the dilemma of competing claims for food and fuel. And let us not forget the competing claims on water. Agriculture is the main user, about 70%, of our fresh water resources.

It is time to act!

Let's take the words of the UN statue serious: "Swords into ploughshares" words into action. CSD 17 has to deliver concrete measures and actions.

In the review year, the CSD identified a range of factors leading to the current food crisis. It was emphasized that fuel price increases have added to the cost of production for small farmers.

Long-term lack of investments in agriculture, rural infrastructure and rural development has eroded productivity gains. In many countries however the productivity could be considerably improved in a sustainable ways. Against this background CSD 17 could focus on measures and action in the field of

- *Productivity improvement*: more private and public investments in agriculture, particularly in scientific, technological and institutional innovations; sharing of knowledge, technology transfer and capacity building were mentioned as key elements. Lack of sustainable land management has aggravated land degradation, reducing soil fertility. Climate change has exacerbated water stress and desertification;
- *Enabling environment*: creating an environment for private investments and stimulating entrepreneurship are crucial. Wide-ranging constraints to rural development were identified from deficient rural development policies and lack of participation in decision-making of key stakeholders, to limited education and underdeveloped financial markets. Land tenure has been biased against women and extension services have fallen behind.
- *Sustainable value chain development*: Attention was also drawn to population growth and increased consumption patterns, i.e. of dairy and meat products, which have contributed to increases in commodity prices. Some pointed out that increased demand for biofuel has become an increasingly significant user of agricultural commodities and may have pushed up their prices. Developing a sustainable value chain (production, processing, marketing, trade and consumption) could be part of the solution.
- *Market access*: Equally important is the impact of subsidy on food production, the need for improved access for agricultural exports from developing countries and supporting the development of local and regional markets. Also the development of markets that are accessible to small farmers as well.
- *Food security and safety net mechanisms*: Lack of access to affordable private health insurance of public health care. In addition to the existing group of chronically poor people, a larger section of the population is now at risk of sliding below the poverty threshold. Food security policies and food aid needs are critical.

The goals of poverty eradication, food security and sustainable natural resource management need to be seen as inter-linked and should be addressed in a coherent and integrated manner. The CSD is uniquely placed to tackle these challenges, focussing on the linkages among the thematic issues and on their relations with the cross-cutting issues identified at CSD-11. In this respect, the role of CSD is even more important today as ever. The CSD will allow for a broad, multidisciplinary approach, with inputs from UN system.

The CSD also provides a unique platform with unmatched institutional strengths in the intergovernmental processes. The Commission has played a significant role in catalysing new actions by Governments, UN system and Major Groups, including the private sector, in advancing sustainable development across the world. Its long-standing engagement with the Major Groups will enable it to hear the diverse voices of civil society groups; and its mandate in promoting partnership will facilitate consensus building and adopt policy decisions underpinned by a shared commitment to progress in implementation on the ground.

As Chairperson of CSD-17, I will work tirelessly with Member States to ensure the success of CSD-17. With the support and collaboration of the Bureau, I'll soon present member States with a rich and balanced programme of work aimed at facilitating consensus building and

intergovernmental negotiations. Our objective is to adopt and implement practical measures that can effectively address the barriers and obstacles.

CSD-17 should be a forward-looking and action-oriented session. I will take the lead in mobilizing broad-based ministerial participation, invite Ministers of relevant portfolios to attend CSD-17, provide guidance on policy options and actions and take bold, action-oriented initiatives during CSD-17. Using this opportunity, I would like to invite member States, UN agencies and Major Groups to start preparing for CSD-17 as early as possible and to consider using CSD-17 as a platform for launching specific commitments and partnership initiatives to complement the policy decisions of CSD-17.

CSD-17 affords us the opportunity to make a difference. We have a historic obligation to our peoples. Let us be bold and ambitious. With leadership, a shared vision and a shared commitment to action, we can work together to make sure this food crisis will be the last one.

**Gerda Verburg, Chairperson of CSD-17**