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National Statement by President of Ireland H.E. Michael D Higgins at the United Nations
Food Systems Summit in New York
Thursday, 23 September, 2021

(Speaking time 3 minutes: 492 words)

Secretary-General, distinguished delegates.

Ireland embraces the profound insight which inspired the Secretary General to call this Summit – that transforming our food systems is central to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Whether or not we transform these systems is the test our authenticity in the words we use while so many are dying of hunger.

The need for action is more urgent than ever – we meet in the shadow of a global pandemic; in a world struggling with new rising inequality; scarred by unprecedented levels of conflict and instability; and facing climate and biodiversity emergencies which threaten our very future on this planet.

Ending world hunger and ensuring the right to food for all must be placed firmly at the top of the political agenda.

We require today a renewed moral consciousness that will give us policies that will ensure that the needs of all can be met, and sustainably, including the 45 million children under five years of age currently suffering from wasting. Eradicating poverty and ending hunger is one of the greatest moral and ethical challenges we face today, all the more so as can be achieved. For this reason, Ireland is proud to support the ‘*re-setting Wasting*’ agenda, which forms part of the Summit’s Zero Hunger Coalition.

We also recognise the change that is needed in our national food system. Ireland is responding to that need through its new stakeholder-led transformative pathway – ‘*Food Vision 2030*’. The Strategy was developed using a food systems approach which recognises the interconnections between food, health, environment and climate. The Strategy rightfully sets the viability and resilience of our farmers and fishers as one of its primary missions.

Food Vision sets an ambitious course for Ireland’s agri-food sector to become a ‘*world leader in sustainable food systems*’ by 2030. I am particularly pleased to see the Strategy’s strong commitment to protecting and preserving Ireland’s rich natural capital, including our soils.

Our soils must be nurtured and protected. Prudent use of nutrients, coupled with greater use of nitrogen fixing crops, must be the basis of sustainable food production, delivering both on biodiversity and on soil health. Pulses can also offer opportunities for farmers, particularly in Africa, to diversify and improve their livelihoods as well as improving the diversity of their diets.

Ireland's experience of inclusive, multi-stakeholder dialogue, has shown that systemic change, while challenging, is possible but that it requires the willingness of all stakeholders to engage and cooperate, and at times to accept difficult compromises.

Based on this experience, Ireland, with UN partners, is leading the development of a Food Systems Transformation Support Facility that will provide structured support to countries to build their own capacity to develop and implement their national pathways.

We in Ireland recognise the urgency of the challenges we face collectively and support the Secretary General's Call to Action Ireland stands ready to work with all stakeholders to accelerate the global transformation to a more equitable, inclusive, resilient and sustainable food system.