
PARLIAMENTARY MEETING ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON FOOD SECURITY

Parliaments addressing agriculture, hunger and food insecurity in times of global crisis

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Organized by the Italian Parliament in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union

SPEECH BY IPU PRESIDENT, DR. THEO-BEN GURIRAB

Distinguished Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies,
Distinguished President of the Italian Senate,
Distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy,
Distinguished Director-General of FAO,
Distinguished President of the Italian Inter-Parliamentary Group,
Fellow Parliamentarians,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet here in Rome one month after the 121st Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Geneva. As many of you know, at each of our Assemblies we adopt an emergency item on a subject of particularly acute international concern. In Geneva, we voted by consensus to debate food security. The resolution that we endorsed recalled that under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food ..." .

The declaration was adopted in 1948. Half a century later, I am distressed to see that for many of our constituents the right to food merely exists on paper.

Food insecurity is a worldwide threat affecting all continents and all countries, rich and poor. Indeed the IPU resolution was originally submitted by the parliaments of Uganda and Australia, two countries with radically different socio-economic indicators.

You will no doubt remember the riots that broke out in several cities in 2007 and 2008, triggered by soaring food prices. Driven to desperation, people took to the streets to demand a solution to the problem from us, their politicians. But we know how difficult it is, if not to say impossible, for one country or even one region to guarantee food security. Across the world there are millions of parents wondering how they are going to manage to feed their families when the next day comes, going to sleep on an empty stomach in order to keep their children alive.

As parliamentarians we can, indeed we must, engage ourselves energetically in the formulation of policies to combat food insecurity. We should view the recent rioting as an alarm bell warning us that food security is not a charity cause. Nutrition is the bedrock of a stable, peaceful world. The livelihoods of billions of people are at stake.

Food security is a fundamental human right. Despite this, the current world food situation falls far short of the goals of the World Summit on Food Security and the UN Millennium

Development Goals. The world's failure to ward off food insecurity is a failing in global progress and development.

Food security is also intricately linked to agricultural policy, and its absence will never be remedied without politicians like ourselves paying close attention to agricultural policy. We must push for stronger investment in agriculture if we are to build a sound basis for better security in the future.

Food security will become even more elusive with the encroachment of climate change. Climate change will pose a long-term challenge to food security. Rising temperatures will damage ecosystems, causing fluctuations in food production. Parliaments need to debate policies to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, strengthen the sustainable management of water, land, soil and other natural resources. And they need to legislate, and make sure that the legislation is well funded and enforceable.

The IPU embraces the responsibility to promote global and regional dialogue on the threat that food insecurity poses to the world. Like so many of the challenges we face today, food security can only be addressed effectively through the concerted action of nations. Over the next few days, the world's decision-makers will come together in this city to reformulate policies related to food security. Their meeting comes not a minute too soon.

On behalf of the IPU, I wish to thank the FAO for leading this global debate. Allow me to reassure my brother and friend, Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the FAO, that he can count on us to bring parliaments on board in tackling a challenge that must be addressed by all stakeholders: governments, parliaments, the media and citizens.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Italian Parliament, which has done so much in helping us to organize this gathering.

I hope that our discussion today will do its small part to contribute to the alleviation of the hunger from which billions of our citizens suffer. I propose to make a President's Summary of our proceedings which I will deliver at the close of our meeting, and I am asking my fellow Speaker Mr. Gianfranco Fini subsequently to deliver our conclusions to the World Summit on Food Security.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a fruitful meeting that is rich in ideas about how our parliaments can work collectively and individually to help remedy food insecurity.

Thank you.