

Committee on World Food Security

23-26 May 2005

FAO report: conflicts, HIV/AIDS, climate change main causes of hunger

23 May 2005, Rome -- Armed conflicts are now the leading cause of world hunger with the effects of HIV/AIDS and climate change not far behind, according to an FAO report presented today at a meeting of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The Committee is holding its 31st Session 23-26 May to review progress in reducing world hunger and achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals.

The report warned that the goal of reducing the number of the world's hungry by half by the year 2015, set by the World Food Summit in 1996 and reinforced by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, are almost certain to be missed by a wide margin if current trends persist. However, the goal of cutting the proportion of hungry and poor, the so-called MDG1, may be achieved in most regions with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa.

Hunger hotspots

With the overall world food security situation little changed on last year, CFS is focusing attention on major shocks that exacerbate short-term hunger emergencies and responses that could ease their impact. Hunger hotspots are increasingly caused by civil conflict, war and natural disasters. In some cases natural disasters and human-induced factors reinforce each other leading to complex emergencies and protracted crises.

The Committee report warns: "In the long run, all countries are likely to be affected by climate changes as a result of the global warming phenomenon." It calls for special attention in coping with key shocks to food security arising from conflicts, natural disasters, plant and animal pests and diseases, HIV/AIDS and possible impacts arising out of climate change.

More conflicts, more food emergencies

The number and scale of conflict-related food security emergencies is increasing, the report warned. "The proportion of food emergencies that can be considered human-made has increased over time. Conflict and economic problems were cited as the main cause of more than 35 percent of food emergencies between 1992 and 2003, compared to around 15 percent in the period from 1986 to 1991."

A paper prepared for a CFS Special Event, Impact of Conflicts and Governance on Food Security and FAO's Role and Adaptation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, says, "The impact of armed conflict is not limited to the conflict area. It diverts resources from national development programmes and weakens government capacity, indirectly affecting the provision of services to the whole population. It usually affects neighboring countries, due to the influx of refugees and its consequences, the increase of military expenditure and the impact on the regional economy. It contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS through displacement, rape or commercial sex."

Peace needed for social and economic development

The paper calls peace "a public good and an essential condition for attaining the MDGs." It calls on all nations to recognize peace as a core objective. "Peace encourages investments and allows social and economic development. Conflict destroys lives, opportunities and environments and may be one of the most significant obstacles to sustainable development as it can destroy in hours and days what has taken years and decades to develop."

CFS opened today with keynote addresses by Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaoré, Belgian Minister for cooperation and development Armand De Decker and FAO's Director-General Jacques Diouf.

A number of Heads of State and Government are attending the meeting, some of whom will participate in CFS Special Events on the following topics:

- Impact of Climate Change and of Pests and Diseases on Food Security and Poverty Reduction;
- Impact of Conflicts and Governance on Food Security and FAO's role and Adaptation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals;
- Green Revolution in Africa.

To access the full set of papers from the CWFS, go to:

http://www.fao.org/unfao/bodies/cfs/cfs31/cfs2005_en.htm