

Taoiseach's remarks at the Presentation of the Hunger Task Force Report
25 September, New York

UN Secretary-General BAN, distinguished Chair, distinguished high level representatives of member States, and members of Ireland's Hunger Task Force, representatives of civil society, ladies and gentlemen...

This is an important day at the United Nations. The countries of the world, at your invitation Secretary-General, are here in great numbers and at the highest levels to take stock of how far we have gotten together in meeting the Millennium Development Goals which were agreed globally eight years ago, in 2000. Appropriately, it is here at the United Nations that States will today reaffirm their commitment to reaching those goals by 2015 and that they will signal their renewed determination to doing so.

It is in this context that this Special Event focuses on the Report of the Irish Hunger Task Force. I am so grateful to the United Nations Secretary General and to many other distinguished figures for taking the time to join us.

I wish to sincerely thank all members of the Task Force for the time and commitment invested in preparing this Report. It was a privilege to count on the expertise of such renowned international experts and the Government of Ireland is deeply grateful for your engagement.

When my Government decided to establish a Hunger Task Force in September 2006, it was on the basis that hunger is the single greatest challenge facing our world today. One hundred and sixty years ago, Ireland experienced first hand the trauma and devastation of famine – losing more than one quarter of our population, (some 2 million people) to death and emigration – and that scar has never been fully erased.

It is unthinkable and unacceptable that in this century, as we pride ourselves on huge technological advances and global interconnectedness, hunger is still the waking reality for at least 860 million people – and that number continues to rise.

Yes, hunger is a complex and multi-faceted issue. And, yes, it is a constantly evolving challenge, as the poorest and most vulnerable are hit again and again – by rocketing food prices, by climate change, by conflict and natural disasters. When the Government of Ireland established the Hunger Task Force, with fifteen of the most distinguished and accomplished experts in Ireland and internationally, it was not to generate more analysis and statistics on the causes and consequences of hunger. That has been done. It was to say “enough is enough” - how exactly should we now channel our energies and our resources to make a real and lasting difference in the fight against hunger.

I welcome the focus of the Report on three key areas of action – increasing agricultural productivity in Africa; targeting maternal and infant undernutrition; and changes in governance and leadership priorities. I now look forward to reflecting on the detailed findings of the Task Force and to working across Government – in particular with the Department of Foreign Affairs, including Irish Aid – to determine how best the recommendations of the Task Force can be integrated into policy and programming. Food security and rural development have long comprised an important component of Ireland’s development assistance. But we can do more. The implementation of the Task Force recommendations require a prioritisation and refocusing which will not be achieved overnight, but which set a clear and ambitious roadmap for our future engagement on hunger reduction.

The success stories are there. Indeed they have been highlighted in this Report. Hunger is not an insurmountable challenge, but it is dependent – and this for me is one of the key messages of the Report – on the will to battle it head on, to follow commitment with resources, to maximise the effectiveness of resources by scaling-up initiatives that have been proven to work, to support innovation, and to work together at all levels, international, national and local. Without cooperation, coherence and long-term commitment, the scourge of hunger will continue to blight country after country, community after community, and render impossible the delivery of other development goals.

It is my sincere hope that this Report will also encourage and inspire other governments and multilateral organisations – in both developing and developed countries – and civil society organisations to tackle hunger with a renewed commitment, and to ratchet it up to the top of our global priorities, where it belongs.

Thank you.

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