

Tomorrow must be Different

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Opening Remarks
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Good morning and greetings all. Thank you for joining us at this important conference

I flew in from New Zealand yesterday and I thought I should share with you that we had our National elections on Saturday. It may be of little moment to most that the party I lead for nearly 12 years won again with a slightly higher share of the vote than 3 years ago.

The point I want to make is that despite all the turmoil across the world, and New Zealand had a tragic and destructive earthquake that destroyed much of our third largest city to deal with as well, democratic parties and democratic Governments can deal with these demanding issues as long as they are prepared to step up and lead.

To step up and lead is I am sure is the ambition of all here as we gather under the banner:

"Rethinking Agriculture to Sustain a Growing Global Population"

On your behalf I want to thank the small group lead by Dr Kenneth Baker, a New Zealander based here in Brussels, his colleague Evie Soames, based in Wales and London, the small World Agricultural Forum (WAF) team in St Louis and many others for bringing this important conference together.

I also want to welcome and thank Dr Leonard Guarraia, President, founder and inspiration behind the World Agricultural Forum.

And most importantly I thank all those who have generously given of their time and expertise to prepare presentations for our conference.

I also thank all of you for giving of your time to help us collectively address the great issue of the generation, how leaders must rethink agriculture so that agriculture can in a sustainable manner, feed a world population of 9 billion by 2050.

At the end of October when the birth of the 7 billionth citizen was expected, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, said that that child will be born into a world of contradictions.

In my remarks I will deal with some of those contradictions, like there never seems to be a shortage of money for guns to kill, but a shortage of money for food to save lives.

Food production is the most important industry on the planet and as such economic policies across the globe dictate agriculture. So the world needs not only to rethink agriculture, it must also rethink economic policy.

I will touch on that as well. Challenges are everywhere and as such it would be easy to be very pessimistic as we scan the horizon but I remain an optimist because we have the ability to confront and resolve the issues we collectively face, we have the ability to feed a world of nine billion people.

First we must have the courage to face the issues and the courage to reject what has failed and the courage to embrace new ideas and new policies.

From my fellow contributors I want to encourage robust contributions and from everyone robust debate.

The scale of the task was put succinctly last week by the President of New Zealand's largest farming organisation when he wrote: 'this month, the number of babies born will equal the population of Portugal, the number of people who will die equal the population of Norway, and the difference will equal the population of Libya - about 6 million.'

He then made the pointed observation that 'the Arab Spring wasn't sparked by rising sea levels but by rising bread prices.'

The same message has been given before; Toby Faber writing on Russia noted that 'The Russian revolution in 1917 started on the streets of Petrograd. It was not worry about the war or a desire for a more liberal government or disgust with the Tsar that brought the proletariat onto the streets: it was hunger.'

For policy makers those two observations carry a clear message in a world where the number of poor grows daily, and growing demand is pushing food prices higher.

Those messages reinforce why food production, the wise use of land and water, investment in agricultural science, and in post harvest management must return to the centre of all Governments' policy development.

To meet the food needs of people everywhere we must include in the partnership and planning not only those who spend their time on economic theory in treasury departments, academia or policy groups but also those whose hands are battered by hard work and whose faces are weathered by a life in the outdoors actually producing food.

Here in Brussels, the administrative centre of the EU and the Euro zone, and reflecting on the financial turmoil in the world I have cut to the chase and titled my remarks:

'Tomorrow must be Different'

Let me observe, for centuries learned men believed that the world was flat - they were wrong. These last decades learned men and women have believed that only one policy model can work and they are wrong.

That doesn't mean that today's leaders are all bad people but as Martin Luther King observed back in 1963 that 'Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.'

Martin Luther King could have been talking about today's world.

In public debates in recent years we have seen what I describe as the 'sleep of reason,' with reason replaced by dogma, slogans and stupidity.

In recent days we have seen the second 'Fall of Rome' because Italy was mired in debts they could not honour and a Government they did not trust.

They join many others. Recall not just Greece but also Ireland & Portugal and the endless list of banks and financial institutions that previously had balance sheets bigger than many countries, they are all gone with losses running into trillions of dollars and the only question is who is next?

Rome fell in 476 AD and many have written learned tomes on the exact reason why. So much has been written that in 1984 German Professor Alexander Demandt published his book on the more than 210 theories why Rome fell.

However many scholars maintain, rather than fall in 476 the change can more accurately be described as a 'complex transformation. '

A 'complex transformation' of what some term the 'free market deregulated model' is what the world needs now if we are to build more cohesive societies that can deliver proper services to all their people including and especially adequate food and clean water.

Today a few have too much money and too many have too little.

The fact that the current policy mix has failed the majority should surprise no one as a key assumption of the neoclassical economic theory that has underpinned much economic thinking these last decades, is that individuals and firms act in a self-interested manner.

And as we now witness that has led to a large and growing divide within societies, with inevitable consequences.

If I might paraphrase one of the most evocative examples of political rhetoric in the 20th century:

On August 20th 1940 Winston Churchill rose in the House of Commons in London, when the outcome of the Battle of Britain was still uncertain, and said in part that;

'Our gratitude goes out to the British airmen, who undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, were turning the tide of the world war.'

He then went on, 'never before in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.'

A powerful tribute to the few.

The battle the world faces today is not over London or any other city, but in the halls of Governments, financial centres and the Boards of large corporations around the world.

But with but minor adaptation 71 years on, Churchill's ringing words can be applied to today's financial crisis, as 'never before in the field of human endeavour has so much been owed by so many to so few.'

That in a nutshell sums up today's financial dilemma and again we require leaders who, undaunted by odds, are willing to step up and advocate and implement different policies so that the world can feed all its citizens.

The late Archbishop of Brazil, Dom Helder Camara, who was an activist for the poor, made a penetrating observation when he once observed that when 'I give food to the poor, they call me a saint', but when 'I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.'

It is interesting how we tend to deflect hard questions by attaching negative connotations to the question but we don't answer the question.

We will only feed the world if we confront the question why the poor have no food? The answer will be a combination of enlightened economic and agricultural policies and I look forward to the insights of our presenters during the conference.

This is not a time for looking backwards, as there is one certainty, yesterday's thinking will not solve tomorrow's problems.

Good resolutions won't solve the problems either. In September 2000 the UN Millennium Conference was held in New York and attracted the largest group of world leaders in history. They gathered at a time of optimism, the cold war was over, the world economy appeared strong, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were still a year away and so, motivated by good intentions, they signed up to the goal of halving world poverty by 2015, now only a short 4 years away.

It sounded good, but as no significant policy changes were made, the bad news is that the world will again fail the hungry as there is no possibility that the goal of halving poverty by 2015 will be achieved.

The level of confusion as to the right way forward has in recent days seen the elected Governments of Greece and Italy brushed aside to be replaced by bankers and bureaucrats.

To put the confusion regarding the way forward into context let me take you back for a moment to the political debate following the 2007/8 crash and the introduction of massive stimulus packages everywhere to prevent the total destruction of the current economic model.

The message went out to citizens in country after country that they must spend. Remarkable advice given that both citizens and governments were in general overburdened by debt, but the economic masters could think of no other approach so the message was 'spend, just spend.'

That can't be right, so driven by optimism, undaunted by the odds, we need to embrace an

entirely different strategy which has the single focus of bringing the 3 billion citizens world-wide who currently live on less than \$US2.50 a day into the world economy and in the process create a huge new market for goods and services.

Such an approach would achieve two major objectives, lift hundreds of millions out of poverty, and create a new engine of sustainable growth in the world economy.

A very simple concept but absolutely essential if we are to have a peaceful world. Most will stand up and say it is a question of money, but really it is a question of choice. My argument is that the world must change its focus from 'guns, bombs and battle plans' and focus on 'land water and food.

Leaders must be persuaded of the value of peace.

The essential partnership, if we are to achieve food for all is the partnership between water, land, science, finance and people.

With the UN forecasting that over 60% of the world's population will soon be living in water challenged regions the world will either learn to work together and conserve water or fight over it.

To make progress we must change the thinking of history that water is free. Fresh water is the most valuable resource on the planet, and as such is of immense value.

What is considered free will inevitably be used in a wasteful manner which is what happens today.

The world must move on from short term political thinking that has for example resulted in vast areas of fertile land and water being used to grow corn for bio-fuel to power motor vehicles rather than to feed people.

A better approach is what President Obama, in consultation with the US Auto industry has done, which is to challenge the engineers in the auto industry to achieve much higher levels of fuel efficiency. The new requirement will lift fuel efficiency from 27m.p.g. to 54.5 m.p.g. by 2025.

Impressive figures which the New York Times reports will reduce US oil requirements by an impressive 2.2 million barrels a day by 2025, or about 20% of current imports.

President Obama's policy addresses a key requirement if we are to have a more sustainable world, and that is that all resources, from water to oil, from land to 'rare earths' must be used in a sustainable manner and inevitably laws in the future will require that.

Investment in science, by Governments and industry is essential to help reach our goals. I like telling audiences that The Stone Age didn't end because of a lack of stones; it ended when the known science devised a new way to achieve society's goals.

With land and water we are working with a diminishing resource whereas with science we are constantly acquiring more knowledge, greater understanding and new possibilities.

The issue of energy supplies which dominates so many debates is an area where huge progress is being made in developing alternative strategies. For example the large agricultural machinery manufacturer New Holland has already developed a prototype tractor which is powered by hydrogen and fuel cells and has no emission or noise.

China, which is often criticised for the number of new coal fired power stations it is building, is also investing heavily in the development of solar energy.

In 2010 alone it provided \$30 billion in credits to its solar industry. (Time Magazine 10-10 2011)

So much is being invested around the world in clean energy projects that I feel certain that long before fossil fuels are exhausted the world will have switched to cleaner energy.

A few years back research demonstrated how potatoes and bananas can be used to vaccinate against diseases like cholera, hepatitis and diarrhoea.

Work is in progress to custom design medicines to meet the specific needs of individuals as determined by their gene code. All progress.

In 1804 when the world's population first reached one billion science played but a modest role in producing the required food. Tomorrow science will play a crucial role in reaching our goal of food for all.

I am clear in my view that the world will need to utilise all the responsible science available to produce the food required and that includes genetic modification. This will be necessary to enable, for example, the development of plants which will grow on salt damaged and dry lands.

Of course appropriate regulations are necessary to monitor these developments. One of the clear lessons we have all learnt from the financial melt down is that proper regulations are necessary to prevent greed driving reckless and irrational decisions.

Another challenge will be to devise a realistic process to ensure that the commercial world's development of higher producing, pest resistant and environmentally friendly plants are actually made available to farmers especially those in poor countries.

To feed the world we all know that the world must embrace new ideas and developments, but many don't want to change as they have an intellectual or political attachment to policies that have failed.

We could take a lead from the British economist, John Maynard Keynes, who would not defend a position that had become intellectually untenable. Challenged on one occasion he was succinct: 'When the facts change I change my mind. What do you do, Sir?' he asked.

None of us like admitting mistakes but to achieve our goal we should adopt the Maori proverb which is: 'turn your face to the sun and your shadow falls behind you.' The shadow of past mistakes we must leave behind us.

Looking out at the uprisings and clashes across the developing and developed world requires

political thinkers to reflect on the possible implication for the stability of their countries if change is too slow in coming.

Much of the discord comes from the huge aggregation of wealth by the few to the detriment of the many.

Such unequal income has many consequences.

Professor Robert Wade of the London School of Economics after a detailed study of income trends over recent years in the US, and it will be the same elsewhere, makes the telling point, that as income polarisation increased households in the bottom 90% began to supplement their stagnant real incomes by more and more borrowing and as they say the rest is history.

To move forward the world must close the chapter on that which has failed, and set the economic and policy sails differently to reflect the commitment to sustain a growing global population.

From an agricultural perspective an issue that will grow with the coming societal and demographic change is that for the first time in history 50% of the world's population now live in urban areas and that percentage will grow to between 60 and 70% in about 20 years.

That means that a much smaller percentage of people will be growing their own food.

This has big implications for post harvest storage, transport and fuel supplies and will require massive additional investments.

The rapid ageing of population in the rich developed world is another trend that will usher in profound shifts in power and politics.

Soon the whole debate over immigration will change. A recent report in New Zealand identified that outside urban areas population growth stopped and is in decline in most regions. Where do tomorrow's agricultural workers come from?

Respected author George Friedman in his book 'The Next Hundred Years,' a forecast for the 21st century, makes the point that by 2030 developed countries will be competing for immigrants. Crafting immigration policy, he said, will involve not finding ways to keep them out, but finding ways to induce them to come.'

While totally logical, 'the people question,' as I call it, will emotionally be the most challenging issue the world faces.

We can't discuss sufficient food for tomorrow's world without reference to climate change. Delegates from 190 countries are gathered in Durban South Africa now to discuss how to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Predictably there is no agreement and of course the Kyoto Agreement expires next year.

The climate sceptics may be happy but in fact what is happening is that the market is moving ahead of political leadership and more and more are demanding evidence that food is produced in a humane and sustainable manner.

I totally accept that our combined activity is having an impact on the world's climate and action to mitigate that is necessary. I suggest that the world needs to set the climate change issue in the context, that we must nurture and protect mother earth because that is necessary to feed the world and by so doing give dignity to all members of the human family.

I spoke earlier of the positive role that science must play in food production and equally in developing alternative sources of energy. I believe that on climate change, investment in science will again provide the best way forward.

I said at the beginning that I was an optimist and in that vein I noted a UN Report last week stating that there had been a 21% drop in Aids cases. Good policy and good science made that possible.

Another report in the Daily Telegraph noted that with more peaceful conditions appearing in parts of Afghanistan, agricultural production is increasing.

Helmand Province's 180,000 farmers are reaping a peace dividend and with new approaches; land that was producing only 4 tonnes of carrots an acre now produces 8 tonnes. Similar results are being achieved with other crops. A telling example of what can be achieved.

Let me conclude that all the issues I have discussed can all be resolved with our current state of knowledge and as we know the growth of knowledge continues.

Reform is never for the faint hearted and at this point in history to succeed reform must be extensive and broad based, but you can help make it happen.

The Inuit people have a saying: "We do not inherit the earth from our Fathers; we borrow it from our children".

Our children are going to need mother earth in good shape if we are to feed nine billion.

Thank you all for the work you are doing and enjoy the conference.