

Tuesday, March 22, 2016

9th Forum for the Future of Agriculture

Final closing address

Speech by FFA Chairman Janez Potočnik

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is always difficult to draw quick conclusions at the end of such an intensive day.

Today a lot of mixed emotions were running through this room and through our minds. It is impossible to stay calm and focused knowing about the horrible events which happened just around the corner.

Before wrapping our today's discussions I would like to say that our minds were, and are, with the death and wounded in today's events, with their families and their friends.

I would like to propose one minute of silence in the memory of those who have lost their lives today in terrorist attacks here in Brussels. Please rise in their memory.

...

Thank you!

Let their lives and their sacrifice for the better world in be remembered.

Coming back to our conference. I hope you agree it was an extraordinary event. UN meeting here in Brussels.

Ban Ki-Moon brought us to the very crux of the issue when he affirmed that SDGs are a declaration of intra-dependence, and that the food chain is a perfect example of how we are all linked. We will only end hunger if we change how we grow, process, distribute and consume food. Because true progress demands new food systems.

Achim Steiner ...

Farmers are no longer an isolated decision-makers, but rather are influenced by the upstream and downstream context in which they operate. We have to recognise this complexity if we are to stop compromising our future ability to feed growing global population.

We need to reinvent agriculture, not addressing only the question of more and more food, but also of more nutrient and healthy food.

21st Century is about managing complexity and we have to do that together.

Reality is local, but context is global. And we need local, specific solutions to address global challenges.

Integrated approach is needed. There is very important role of small farmers as part of the private sector.

Europe has a central role to play in this transformation. We have few decades of experiences of the Common Agricultural Policy. This is not relevant only for the rest of the world, it is relevant also for viable agriculture sector in Europe.

During our **first session**, **Jose Graziano da Silva** emphasised that family farmers here in Europe and around the world are the key to providing food security, but we must realise that each faces different obstacles. Together, we must invest in available, accessible, and inclusive tools and technologies to help us make the necessary changes.

We have to complete the unfinished agenda of agricultural transformation we started some decades ago.

We agree about diagnosis, but we do not agree about the solutions.

Malnutrition and obesity are both part of our reality. Labelling and informing consumers is critical if we want more responsible consumer's decisions.

One of the priorities should be to address the poor families, the smallholders, the family farms.

His warning on the impacts of climate change on our food production cycles highlights the need for governments to seriously assess their capacity to meet the SDGs. The uncertainty connected to climate change is huge and it will dramatically influence on the farmers future. Better information is needed.

Silos governance is one of our major problems.

It was also good to hear from **Commissioner Hogan** that the European Commission is fully committed to the SDGs; providing greater market access, climate leadership and more resources for our environment. Indeed, it was good to hear that European agriculture has already dropped its greenhouse gas emissions by 24% from 1990. However, it is our reaching out to Africa and the developing world so that we can help them grow, both literally and figuratively, which shows the way forward – it is through sharing knowledge, both basic and advanced, that we will achieve the SDGs.

Panel discussion – session 1

The panel group in session one were collective in their urging that real systems change is needed right now to address climate change, and change the way we 'do' food. That we need to get out of the silo and view the food system as a whole, joining together food, health, production and the environment in our approach. Right now there is a wealth of knowledge, research and technical know-how to bolster this change, but the key is empowering farmers, and specifically small holders, to access this knowledge, technology and capital.

Jeffrey Sachs ...

Forum for the Future of Agriculture is a unique and timely gathering of world leaders in agriculture and sustainable development to discuss the crucial issue of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Agriculture stands at the heart of the challenge of sustainable development. Yet the challenges are daunting. We must feed a growing world population with a nutritious diet; raise the living standards of smallholder farmers; make the food supply resilient to climate shocks; and lower the impact of the farm sector on land, water, and climate.

This is a profound challenge that will require the best of science, policy, business, and civil society operating together in a bold and cooperative manner.

We cannot get food supplied, and this is our goal, without managing climate change.

None of the problems is solvable in less than a generation. And we have to stir this journey not to fall from the cliff.

We need goals, it will be hard to achieve anything without them (Kennedy's inspiring quote), and SDG's are that kind of goals - a global contract, but they are not obligatory and there is no court to enforce it.

I'm not optimist, I'm not pessimist, I'm just an analyst.

If we really want to help, than help the girl in Africa to get educated.

Panel discussion – session 2

Education is key to changing societal behaviours in order to achieve SDGs. This spans from making people understanding the value and cost of food and reducing food waste to, for example, get consumers to understand the benefits of reusing nutrients recovered from our waste.

The third session

John Ingram – Food Systems Programme Leader stressed that agricultural innovations can simultaneously address multiple SDGs, but synergies among them can be promoted most effectively when considered via a “food system” approach. One cannot address food challenges in isolation and problems of the food chain cannot be solved looking only through the lenses of agricultural policy. We need a whole-system approach.

Ladies and Gentleman,

All these speakers have done their part to move our ideas and our future forward.

To build this future we will need new policy ideas, new innovations but above all we will need a new kind of society. One based not just on what values we wish to see in each other, but one that places a great value and dignity also on our environment. A pledge not to see our planet as a resource that we can consume and throw away, but as our shared home. There is no other choice; we still have found no other place like Earth. For now, our future is here, or there is no future.

The time has come to forge a new global contract for a global community.

If we were to design such a deal, we would immediately see that all the partners in this new Global Contract need to be satisfied. Our planet, with its finite resources, needs to be recognized as not just our partner, but our benefactor.

In return for our very existence, we should take care of our home. Just as a good farmer takes care of the long-term health of his or her soil, water and air, so should we nurture and support our planet. This is not just for our benefit, but for the future of every living thing on this earth.

We are now in the process of rewriting our contract with the planet. It can no longer be an old, colonialist model of over-exploitation and over-extraction. As citizens of a rapidly changing world, we must live within planetary boundaries, whether they are resources or climate. The new SDGs already state seventeen goals that form the requirements of both us, and the planet: strong ecosystems, enough food for all, sustainable cities and communities and more. These goals we have globally agreed on.

Now we must do the hard work of making the SDGs a reality. In order to survive, we know what we have to do, but the changes we seek to make are hard. In order to be truly sustainable, they require us to change our way of life and to reorganise our communities. It is a transformation so radical that we have not seen the like since the Industrial Revolution changed the face of the earth in a single generation.

Nobody should be under the impression that this can be done by making only small changes to our existing systems. It is a whole-scale revolution that touches all the corners of our lives, jobs and societies. There is no choice and there is no real alternative. We must turn away from our current and wasteful linear models of production and towards an economy that rewards sustainability, long-term thinking and environmental consciousness. It needs to change your lives and mine. To pretend otherwise is to ignore the scale of the challenge that is written into our new global contract.

The SDGs are a great step forward and so is the Paris Agreement. But words and ceremonies are easier than deeds and hard decisions. I can tell you this as a former politician. Fulfilling the terms of our new contract will be among the hardest things our societies have ever done.

And yet, I know that we are up to the challenge. We have advantages in innovation, in communication but above all in terms of organisation that we have never had before. Our younger generations are not just aware of what is happening locally, but they are growing up with a global perspective.

We can share our technologies and best thinking at the touch of a button. We can organise, come together, and demand change at a pace that would be unthinkable to even our own parents. There is extraordinary support for our global goals and I urge you all to use it.

I leave you today with a challenge and also with an invitation.

The challenge is to consider what each of us can do, personally and professionally, to realise food and environmental security.

The invitation is to come back here next year. There, we can take stock again, see where we are and what we can do to further our goals. Whether we have upheld our end of the Global Contract.

Finally, I would like to thank all who made this years FFA possible - all those working hard for many days behind the stage to make the event possible. They would deserve to be on the stage as much as all of us speakers, since we all collectively contributed to the success of the event.

I would also like to thank both organisers ELO and Syngenta for the continuous support they are offering to the FFA. I sincerely hope they will stay with us also in the future and support this process of necessary changes we are collectively facing and trying to address. Changes and challenges, which are many times not easy also for them.

And finally finally, thank you, all the participants, for being with us on this very interesting day. I wish you all a safe trip home and we will see you soon. Next year, we will celebrate 10 years of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture. You surely do not want to miss that!

Thank you.