

**10<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future of Agriculture**  
**TIME FOR SOLUTIONS**  
**OPENING**

Your excellency, former UN Secretary-General **Kofi Annan**, Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen,

**Welcome** to the 10<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future of Agriculture. It is my pleasure to chair this event again.

You certainly all **remember the last year's FFA**. Many of us were here, sharing this room, and being tested by the tragic events none of us will ever forget. And we are here again. The message of the wounded city to the world was loud and clear: We will never allow fear to rule and dominate our lives.

Dear friends, we leave in the time where we are confronted with extraordinary challenges. To echo the words of the authors of the Ecology and Society paper called "**Synchronous Failure: the emerging causal architecture of global crisis**":

*"In a world where external reserves of resources are limited and second chances are thus increasingly rare, humankind must develop the ability to proactively navigate away from this new kind of crisis - globally extensive and inter-systemic - that could otherwise irreversibly degrade the biophysical and economic basis for human prosperity."*

For the first time in a human history we face the emergence of a **single, tightly coupled socio-ecological system that encompasses the whole planet**. We are more interconnected and interdependent than ever and **our responsibility**, individual and collective, has increased dramatically, even comparing to just a generation ago.

But, for the first time in the history, we have also showed that we fully **understand and share the seriousness of the challenges we are facing and the necessity to address them** by agreeing and committing to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.

We are **running out of the time** to create the new society we need. Our planet, our climate and our finite resources are already making sure of that. One of the panellists at a conference I have recently attended put it nicely: **The future has already arrived, and it is called present!**

Neither you, nor I, can change this fundamental truth or its consequences. They will shape the decisions we make, whether they are in the boardroom, at our dinner table or on a farmer's field. Some might be tempted to think that we can avoid these issues. That we can continue on ... making small changes here and there. That we should not upset anyone, tread lightly and not make too much noise. If we are to ensure the long-term wellbeing of ourselves and our planet, this kind of approach would be catastrophic. **It is high time we act on our promises. It is high time for solutions.**

Together, **everybody here in this room** – from EU institutions to large and small companies, from farmers to consumers – must find within him - or herself the **knowledge and courage to do what we know is necessary**.

For some the changes, we will discuss today, might be hard. We should make sure that those affected - at least in the short run – will be helped. That they will have our understanding and our support, financial and otherwise.

Make no mistake; these kinds of fundamental changes are not just driven by idealism and ideology, but by **simple numbers and irrefutable facts**.

Let me share a few of those with you;

- In just one generation we can expect global population to increase for more than it was the total population just a century ago, and billions moving from poverty to the middle-class consumption. <sup>1</sup>
- 2017 is the third year in a row that the Arctic winter ice has been in a record low. The previous records were held by 2015 and 2016. <sup>2</sup>
- New scientific evidence suggests we only have 6 years' worth of CO2 emissions left before we pass the point where we can contain climate change under 1.5 degrees of global warming. <sup>3</sup>
- If we continue with business as usual, the UN estimates that up to 3.9 billion people could be left without access to safe water supplies for drinking and sanitation by 2050; <sup>4</sup>

All **these facts and threats are real**. They show the unsustainable world we live in, and the potentially catastrophic world we are heading to.

However, the **answers exist**. We have the tools, skills and knowledge to implement sustainability at the global, European and local levels. Therefore, our FFA is about the solutions we have now, and the world we seek for tomorrow.

The already agreed global framework - the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the binding agreements we made in Paris – is clear about our direction. But these agreements are global in scope, what we need now is to drive solutions at the national level and **engage all corners of society and work together**.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In *“The dawn of system leadership”*, which was published in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, its authors state: *“We face a host of systemic challenges beyond the reach of existing institutions and their hierarchical authority structures. Problems like climate change, destruction of ecosystems, growing scarcity of water, youth unemployment, embedded poverty and inequity require unprecedented collaboration among different organisations, sectors and even countries.”*

To change our world for the better will **require extraordinary leadership at every level**. Therefore, I am proud to announce that former Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nobel Peace Prize laureate **Kofi Annan** is here with us today to give the keynote.

His keynote will be followed by **our first session of the day**, which will look at how we can enable change to make the Sustainable Development Goals a reality. We know that none of these 17 targets can be met without food and environmental security, but we must now make sure our global policies reflect that reality.

**Europe** too will need to play its part in delivering on food and environmental security in the framework of these agreements. The best and most well-funded mechanism we have is **Common Agricultural Policy**. We must make sure that it will deliver and make the necessary reforms.

It should help land managers provide all the services our societies expect, from food to clean air, to water and protected biodiversity. It should ensure that the European countryside remains attractive for those who live and work there.

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<sup>1</sup> Kharas, Homi. *The Unprecedented Expansion of the Global Middle Class: An Update*. Global Economy and Development at the Brookings Institute. 2017.

<sup>2</sup> The Guardian. *Arctic ice falls to record winter lows after polar heat waves*. 22 march 2017. Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/mar/22/arctic-ice-falls-record-winter-low-polar-heatwaves>

<sup>3</sup> Lanchberry, John – RSPB Presentation to Civil Dialogue Group on international trade.

<sup>4</sup> *UNEP (2017) Resource Efficiency: Potential and Economic Implications. A report of the International Resource Panel*. Ekins, P., Hughes, N., et al.

However, farmers and foresters can provide only part of the solution. **All the actors in the food systems chain** must contribute to the solutions needed.

And all of us here today as **consumers** should rethink the role we play. We cannot afford to throw away one third of our food and over-eat on what is left. Obesity is a serious health problem in industrialised societies, and both issues deserve a policy response.

I am therefore happy to say that the transformation of the CAP, what is needed and how we will achieve it, is the subject of our **second session**. I look forward to hearing from **Commissioner Hogan** and how he sees the next stage of this crucial policy.

As I have said before, we will need to **reorder our entire economic model** if we are to achieve sustainability. It is therefore my honour to present our second keynote speaker in the afternoon. **Ellen MacArthur**, I dare to say my dear and respected friend, learned personally of what it means to have finite resources when she sailed solo around the world. Today, she has taken that lesson to heart and her foundation is leading the way in transforming our economic systems from linear to circular.

We cannot, however, just talk about policy and how to do better. I hope that the **first speakers of the afternoon will also personally inspire you**. They are all **pioneers in their field**. In their hands, solutions are being applied every day and the results are extraordinary. This afternoon, they will show you what is already being done, and that solutions are closer than we might think or believe.

**Reshaping our economic models** to achieve sustainability is inevitable, but the necessary transition will not happen without public acceptance and support. Europe has agreed on its circular economy package and starts to understand the need for de-coupling of economic growth from resource use and environmental impacts. We also understand much better that the end of linear production models provides tremendous advantages.

I am therefore delighted to say that that Commission Vice-President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, **Jyrki Katainen**, will be delivering the keynote address that will open the third session. Job creation and economic development are an important part of making sure our food chain transitions to a sustainable model.

Together, our sessions today will allow you to see the **links between our global, European and local efforts**. These must now come together if we are to provide the leadership, opportunities and realities we need.

**Finally**, we should also not forget that FFA is celebrating the **10<sup>th</sup> anniversary**. As you will notice, this fact will be reflected by twice shortly sharing a moment together on the stage with those who contributed most to our journey for so many years.

Ladies and gentlemen, ... **It is time for solutions**.

We can no longer afford to wait and see, to keep using the old wasteful economic models of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and pretend that they will sustain us in the coming decades. We are surrounded by the evidence that they do not.

Achieving simultaneously **food and environmental ability, stability and sustainability** will not be easy, but we must do it. Together. Last year has shown us that many of our fellow citizens are rapidly losing faith in common goals and global projects. It is **time for our politicians to be the leaders they promise us to be**, and to show the courage of their convictions.

Today, I ask you **not only to tell everyone** that our greatest strength lies in common action, **but also to show them**. To demonstrate that our global and European projects can ensure the survival of this planet and all of its species, including human beings.

Alone, a **single country cannot hope to achieve all this**. We will either learn to work together or we will hang separately.

The challenges we face are not only material and economic, but they are also **profoundly spiritual**. They ask us to re-examine our place in the world, and what our dominance of the land means to us on the long term.

To open our event, I am therefore deeply honoured to now invite to the stage **His Excellency Monsignor Alain Paul Lebeaupin**, who has a special message from **His Holy Father, Pope Francis** for all of us here today.

Enjoy the day!