Nearly a billion people are hungry and hundreds of millions more lack adequate nutrition. As the United Nations General Assembly affirmed in 2010, this is “an outrage and a violation of human dignity,” requiring “urgent measures.” Yet governments are failing to resolve the crisis and the UN is not answering the needs of a hungry humanity.

The world food crisis is decades old, but now it is gravely worsening. Food prices have risen rapidly, reaching historically high levels. Floods, fires and droughts have reduced harvests in key producer countries, warning of the dangerous effect of climate change. Many factors, well-known to the food policy community, are damaging the prospects of the human food supply. Optimistic projections for the future, based on supposed technological breakthroughs and market miracles, should not distract us from the danger signals. We cannot ignore the painful reality of spreading hunger and famine in which emergency response systems are already overwhelmed. The Horn of Africa famine today is a reminder of past failures and a harbinger of the tragedies that lie ahead.

The knowledge to guide policy is at hand. Agencies within the UN system, including FAO, WFP, IFAD, and UNEP, have conducted serious research and developed extensive information about these issues. The *International Assessment of Agricultural Science, Knowledge and Technology for Development* (IAASTD Report) (2008) provides incomparable analysis from a global group of scientists. Civil society groups and associations of small producers have a lot to contribute from on-the-ground knowledge and experience. And the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has taken the lead in identifying problems and policy responses.

But national governments have not risen to the challenge. The UN General Assembly passes bland and disappointing resolutions while the G20, the World Bank and other policy bodies have fallen far short of effective action. Pressed by well-funded lobbyists and powerful financial and agricultural interests, policy makers are content with generalities that preserve the status quo, rather than acting with courage and real initiative. Citizens need bold steps and effective leadership, so that looming catastrophe can be averted.

**1. Ecological Approaches to Food Production**

Large-scale, agro-industrial methods of production are exhausting the planet’s resources and emitting large quantities of greenhouse gases (as much as a third of the emissions burden according to reliable estimates). As the IASTD Report and other respected sources make clear, ecological farming methods result in far better long-term productivity, sustainability and fairness to small producers. These methods preserve rural communities, protect resilience, and avoid destructive use of pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers and fossil fuels. Ecological approaches conserve the soil, promote rainwater retention and conserve biological diversity. Agricultural and food policy must center on a global transition to ecological farming if future generations are to be fed and the planet’s resources conserved.
2. New Green Revolution & Agro-Industrial Ideologies
Advocates of the New Green Revolution create dangerously misplaced hope for an agro-industrial solution to the crisis. They argue falsely that scientific and technological breakthroughs, new investments, and global market forces will solve the great challenges we face. They ignore the enormous environmental and social ill-effects of the agro-industrial model and they overlook serious, scientific approaches to the food crisis such as that offered by IAASTD, UNEP, FAO and others. Policymakers must abandon interest-driven ideologies. Citizens need an open and democratic debate about the future, in which agricultural science and practice is respected, food-consumers’ and producers’ needs recognized, and claims of future generations honored.

3. Local Food Production and Food Sovereignty
After decades of pressure from food exporting countries and international lenders, many developing countries have adopted agricultural policies that privilege export cash crops over domestic food production. As a result, many countries do not produce enough food to feed their populations – some with shortfalls of fifty percent or more for basic foodstuffs. Today, rising and volatile global food prices are creating a crisis that is especially serious for people of such vulnerable countries. Some analysts mistakenly argue for an even more “open” approach to agricultural trade, but the dangers are clear – such trade is far from free and fair, cheap subsidized food imports often ruin smallholders, while agro-industry displaces local producers and expands the export sector. Though smallholders face increasing difficulties, they continue to produce a high percentage of the food consumed in developing countries and they could boost production considerably. Governments must do their utmost to protect and strengthen smallholders, so that basic food needs can be met as locally, reliably and fairly as possible. Food policy must be subject to local democratic control by producers and consumers, through the exercise of food sovereignty and the affirmation of the right to food. All citizens must participate in the difficult choices necessary to avert famine in a world of rapid climate change.

4. Global Food Governance & the Committee on World Food Security
Lack of a strong, coherent and democratic system of global governance has deepened the multiple crises facing humanity, such as climate change, economic instability, resource depletion and hunger. In the food policy sector, there has been a confusion of responsibilities and competing authorities, ranging from the World Bank, through the UN High Level Task Force, to the G20, the UN General Assembly, the various UN agencies, and the Rome-based Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Of these, the CFS is the most knowledge-based and democratic, with input from all concerned actors, including civil society groups and small producers. The CFS should be strengthened and given a lead in policy formation. The UN General Assembly, the World Bank and other actors should increase their coordination and harmonization with the CFS. The General Assembly should produce annually-focused (not general) resolutions on food security and the right to food, harmonized with the CFS, enriched by civil society and expert consultation, and addressing recommendations by the Special Rapporteur. Harmonization with CFS in 2011 would mean a focus on price volatility, land tenure/land-grabbing, gender and nutrition.

5. Land Rights and Land-Grabbing
For the past several years, hedge-funds, governments and agro-industrial companies have been buying or leasing large blocks of agricultural land worldwide in a process widely known as “land-grabbing.” Falsely promoted as creative investment and a step towards greater market
efficiency, this process is largely driven by speculation and investors’ search for new, high-profit investment vehicles. Far from increasing food production for local consumption, it is likely to result in export-oriented crops, including non-food commodities, especially bio-energy feedstocks. Land-grabbing has already displaced tens of millions of small producers (peasants and pastoralists) who have lost their livelihoods, worsening poverty and hunger and driving waves of migration. The recently-elongated investment principles under the aegis of the World Bank are unacceptable. Civil society groups have advanced alternative proposals to control these large-scale farmland investment moves. There should be binding rules that inter alia give strong protection to small producers, increase security of land tenure, and insure that land use meets food and conservation needs not investors’ hunger for wealth accumulation.

6. Price Speculation
Financial firms and agro-industrial companies have moved very large sums into produce markets, or derivatives markets based on agricultural products. Four companies control seventy-five percent of the world’s international grain trade, while governments (under pressure from the World Bank and the IMF) have dismantled their national food reserve and marketing systems. Speculative investment funds have multiplied, as billions of dollars have flowed into the derivatives markets, driving prices higher, contributing to price volatility, and resulting in increasing financial desperation for small producers. Policy solutions to this dangerous speculative frenzy should include tough new market controls to limit speculative pressures.

7. Bio-Energy
Bio-energy policies are diverting enormous quantities of food and vegetable matter into fuel for motor vehicles and other energy uses. In 2009, an estimated 100 million tons of food grains were diverted for this purpose worldwide at a time of severe food shortage. Today, bio-energy production continues to climb, seriously reducing the food supply of hundreds of millions of people. Bio-energy production results in land use changes on a massive scale, clearing forests and disrupting agricultural and environmental systems. Supporters of bio-energy claim that it results in fewer greenhouse gas emissions than fossil fuels – a very poor standard but usually untrue nonetheless. Many studies have shown that bio-energy crops have a negative environmental impact, especially when all factors are taken into account, including land-use change, production inputs, storage, transportation and water use. Government subsidies and mandates for fuel-mix percentages are driving the run-up in bio-energy production. The bio-energy market leads to rising land and food prices, due to crop substitution effects and yet bio-energy cannot possibly make up for declining fossil fuel reserves. To avoid further dangerous diversion of food crops, bio-energy must be de-subsidized, fuel-mix mandates must be eliminated, and use must be taxed or rigorously restricted to promote food security and environmental sustainability.

8. Water
Fresh water, essential for agriculture and human life, is in increasingly short supply and agricultural production is reaching water supply limits in many areas. Seventy percent of human freshwater consumption is used for agricultural purposes. Humanity must use water much more carefully through conservation programs and must drastically reduce pollution of water systems. Aquifer supplies must be used in a strictly sustainable fashion, allowing withdrawals in strict proportion to re-charging. Re-forestation and conservation land-use can promote more reliable rainfall and hold moisture in the soil. Abusive industrial and mining uses of water must also be
ended, including new water-intensive methods of gas extraction and bio-energy production. Steps must also be taken to fairly share out the world’s existing freshwater resources among diverse claimants, with due regard to established water rights and agricultural production needs. Water conflicts must be transformed into water cooperation and the right to water affirmed.

9. Soil Protection
Soil is being destroyed (or taken out of food production) at a rapid rate, through the destruction of soil organisms by pesticides and herbicides, wind and water erosion, pollution, desertification, salinization, deforestation, and unchecked expansion of human habitat. Climate change makes matters worse. Industrial agriculture, responding to speculation and bio-energy demand, seeks to grow crops in marginal areas, with thin soil cover or poor soil quality, putting still more precious soil-earth at risk. Only robust global conservation measures, including land use laws and conservation rules, can enable the earth’s agricultural lands to remain healthy and productive for future generations.

10. More Investment?
Food policy discourse often refers to the “need” for “more investment.” No doubt humanity needs more rural investment for constructive pathways to the future – investments that are subject to long-term social goals and priorities. But if investments mainly result in land-grabbing, agro-industrial development and massive infrastructure, they will have a severely negative impact. Smallholders and agro-ecological farmers are already making considerable investments in their production and their efforts should be encouraged and supported. Positive investments from all outside sources (for example, in more sustainable use of water resources or in new cropping techniques) should improve living standards of rural people and speed the great transition to environmentally sustainable food production.

11. Agricultural Families and Agricultural Labor
The largest proportion of hungry and under-nourished people are ironically those who work in the agricultural sector, whether as marginal small producers or as agricultural laborers. Among them, women and girls are especially vulnerable, even though women are often the major family food producers. The food production system drives families by the millions into destitution and abandonment of the land. Thousands of farmers have been driven to suicide. Big agribusiness companies and large landowners often use migrant laborers, denied the full protection of law, for the most arduous and crippling field work. Humanity must end this oppressive system. New gender-sensitive assistance to rural families, new legal protections, minimum wage standards and other policies must be put in place to guarantee a decent life to those who grow the majority of the world’s food.

12. Nutrition & Food Quality
Food is more than basic caloric intake. Good diets require proper nutrition and quality, safe food for overall health and well-being. Nutrition problems fall most heavily on the poor, who lack access to (and cannot afford) nutritious, quality foods for a balanced diet. But nutrition and food safety problems also are widespread in rich countries (and among better-off citizens in poor countries), largely because of unhealthy foods and drinks. The worldwide problem of overweight and obesity, affecting two billion people according to WHO, testifies to the very widespread nutrition problem. Companies selling processed foods and soft drinks, as well as fast-food restaurant chains, advertise and lobby fiercely to be able to sell dangerously unhealthy products, with minimal regulation. Food and agricultural policy must adopt a new stance that takes nutrition and food quality clearly into account, with closer scrutiny of nutritional issues, ranging
from emergency nutrition for under-fed infants to public regulation of food products, food safety rules, planned food availability in under-served urban neighborhoods and restrictions on food advertising. Public authorities must make nutritious, quality foods available to the poorest citizens, in higher-income settings governments must improve labeling of prepared foods, develop robust food safety regulations, and take action of other kinds to promote healthy diets for all citizens.

13. Other Issues
There are many other matters of concern. The bees, the world’s most important pollinators are suffering from an unprecedented population crash, while other insect pollinators are facing decline or extinction (pesticides are a likely cause). Increasing meat consumption, an unhealthy trend, is diverting more grains into animal feed, reducing primary food availability just when bio-energy demands are rising. Genetically-modified seeds threaten to eliminate the rich diversity of local seed stocks that provide resiliency in the face of climate change and other threats to crops such as plant disease and pests. Over-fishing and pollution of the world’s oceans are leading to sharp reduction of global wild fish stocks, depleting a highly-important source of protein as well as livelihoods of seashore communities. And finally, human population increase of about 75 million people per year is putting rising pressure on the world’s food resources, on land-use and on the global environment generally.

14. Food Enough for All
The world’s agricultural system has the capacity to produce more than enough nutritious, quality food for all the people on the planet, but this incredible productivity is not organized to end hunger. Instead, it is rapidly being re-organized to provide further benefits for investors and (consequently) products for the most affluent consumers. Policymakers must recognize that the supply shortfalls leading to massive hunger and malnutrition are not the result of natural forces but instead are primarily the result of human choices that can and must be changed. Governments will face unprecedented political upheavals if global solutions are not adopted soon. Innovative policies must be based on well-established science, sharing of the world’s bounty, democratic accountability and the fundamental human right to food.

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Statement of Support from Rome:
The Civil Society Mechanism members of the Committee on World Food Security Advisory Group welcome the statement of the NGO Working Group on Food and Hunger at the United Nations. The statement is a persuasive call to the General Assembly to adopt a strong resolution addressing the scandal of world food insecurity. We feel the issues highlighted in the statement are important ones. We join in urging the General Assembly to consider in its debates the outcomes of the CFS plenary session scheduled for 17-22 October 2011 regarding governance of land tenure, price volatility, investment in agriculture and gender and nutrition. Beatriz Gasco Verdier – IPC; George Dixon Fernandez – MIJARC; Mamadou Cissokho – ROPPA; Natalia Landivar – FIAN