

Delivering Zero Hunger – Demonstrating Impact

New York, 25 September 2014

Statement by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Mr. Charlie Flanagan TD

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to co-host this High Level Meeting during the UN General Assembly.

We are focusing here on a fundamental issue of foreign policy. We meet as the international community negotiates our collective response to climate change, and a new framework for global development to build on the Millennium Development Goals.

As I review these processes, I cannot escape the simple conclusion that the credibility and sustainability of the international community depends on how we address and solve the persistent scandal of global hunger. We have made progress, but it bears repeating that over 800 million people still suffer from hunger. And yet, we have the tools to put this right in a generation. The Secretary General's Zero Hunger Challenge is the inescapable challenge for the world's policymakers gathered in New York this week.

Fighting global hunger is at the heart of Ireland's aid programme, and of our foreign policy. It will remain so.

We already devote 20% of Irish Aid funding to actions to end hunger.

And we are focusing on the insidious problem of malnutrition, and especially child stunting. Undernutrition saps the potential of children, communities and nations. It is the biggest underlying cause of deaths in children under five. It causes 8000 child deaths every day. The Taoiseach last year committed Ireland to doubling our development funding for nutrition by 2020. Today, I commit to delivering on that promise.

Together with the United States, Ireland is leading the 1,000 Days Movement, which focuses attention on the vital period for mothers and babies from pregnancy to the second birthday. And, with the Governments of our

Key Partner Countries in Africa, we are proud to help build the Scaling Up Nutrition movement. It is achieving a stronger response to nutrition across education, health, and agriculture, and across the public and private sectors. I welcome my compatriot, Tom Arnold, who is with us today in his new capacity as interim SUN Coordinator.

We have recognised that climate change represents one of the main obstacles to achieving nutrition security, and Irish Aid is investing in research on what works for poor, smallholder farmers who bear the brunt of the challenge. We have to include these farmers in our dialogue at all levels. Many of them, of course, are women whose simple priority is the survival of their children. They tell us we need to innovate in conservation agriculture. And Irish Aid is responding in Zambia, in Malawi, in Mozambique and in Ethiopia, including through local Government.

In Malawi, we have fostered partnerships and alliances to promote crops like groundnuts and beans. These not only improve diets with essential proteins and vitamins, they also provide income for poor farmers. Critically, they improve soil fertility by fixing nitrogen and they help reduce erosion.

So why do more people not grow these crops? Farmers we spoke to explained that they had no good quality seed. So Irish Aid went into partnership with researchers and distributors to support the Malawi Seed Industry Development Project. An alliance was born. Working closely with the private sector and smallholders we have managed to build the production and availability of high quality seeds.

We have drawn on Ireland's experience of cooperatives and of rural transformation to build the seed market. We did not have to balance climate and nutrition and gender – we focused on all three elements. We worked with women. We helped them enrich their soils. We helped them enrich their diet. We helped them earn money for their families and send their children to school. And in one generation we believe they can achieve zero hunger in their communities, zero malnutrition, and sustainable farming. The Secretary General challenged us three years ago to end hunger – and this is a dream which can be achieved, through policy change and practical action.

I want to see such learning taken to scale. Ireland confirmed yesterday that we will join the new Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture. We recognise that food systems are both a cause of and a solution to

climate change. But if we work together we can find the triple win necessary, not just the trade-offs. We can adapt to and limit climate change; we can feed the world; and we can ensure all are fed with nutritious food.

As Prime Minister Rutte has demonstrated, progress is only possible in partnership. I am heartened to see the Irish private sector contributing significant resources alongside Irish Aid to agriculture that improves nutrition. For instance in Zambia, in a project managed by the Irish NGO Concern Worldwide. I am determined to build these links between Irish business, Irish civil society and Irish Aid, working with women farmers and farmer groups.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Great Famine of the 19th Century scarred our nation and lives on in our collective conscience. We have a deep sense of the injustice of hunger in a world of plenty. We offer our expertise, our experience and our resources to the fight to end hunger and undernutrition. It is with pride and determination, therefore, that I look forward to signing the Zero Hunger Declaration in New York today.