

The Sir John Crawford Memorable Address
Perth, Australia, 26 August 2013

By

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Hon. John Kerin Chairman of the Crawford Fund;
His Excellency Malcolm McCusker, Governor of Western Australia;
HE Festus Mogae, former President of Botswana and Chairman of the Coalition for Dialogue on Africa;
Other high officials from Australia and Africa;
Ladies and gentlemen

I am very happy to be here, and am extremely honored to join the ranks of the sterling group of persons who have delivered the Sir John Crawford Memorial Address.

When I first received the invitation to join you all at this conference and to deliver the 2013 Sir John Crawford Memorial Address here in this beautiful and historic city of Perth, the first thought that came to mind was: can this be for real? You see, I first learned of Sir John Crawford – the great Australian Economist, the Advisor to the World Bank, the Chancellor of the Australian National University, the man declared Australian of the year and so much more, way back in 1986. This happened as I sat in the Memorial Library of the University of Wisconsin – Madison with a young student - John Crawford - from Sierra Leone that was visiting a friend on campus from his home and had been given a temporary pass to use the institution's library for research purpose. John's friend introduced us and he asked me about his chances of being accepted to participate in the annual and popular university's Summer Institute for Young Researchers from developing countries.

Later as I went pass John, I noticed a look of concern on his face as he stared at his laptop screen and so I asked if he was having problems with his research. "Yes Madam, I learned all about you and your impressive work in your home country and abroad, and I learned about four of your colleagues in this Summer Institute simply by typing your names in the Web Search. With this I decided to type in my own name to see what was recorded but nothing came up about me. Instead, I saw a list with others carrying the same name - 18 John Crawford from around the world but nothing about me. I looked over the list on his screen and Sir John Crawford's name was the first. We opened the document and together read about this great man. I visited that same list two weeks ago and I still did not see young John Crawford of Sierra Leone's name on it. I did pray that he was given the chance to remain in school and achieve his goal of becoming an agricultural scientist and researcher.

Today, as I pay homage to Sir John Crawford, Australian's proud son, I would like to express my delight that his memory lives on in so many ways – including this Annual Memorial Address and the Crawford Fund for a Food Secured World, I wish to register my sincere thanks to the organizers of this year's conference for honoring me through their kind invitation to deliver the 2013 address.

In my letter of invitation to deliver this address, I was asked to speak on the topic: Opportunities in the Mist of the Global Food Crisis, but given the option to center my address on other areas that my research and work have focused on including that of the right to food which is being denied to millions daily; the challenges associated with attaining long-term food security for Africa; resources access rights and gender equality; gender, food security and development. I will attempt to reference all of the topics as they are all interrelated.

I will start with hunger and food security which I first learned about in a way that troubled me for the first time in 1962 when I was 17 years old. Before that day, I had not taken my mother – a professional nurse daily reminder to her children to take only the amounts of food that we could eat and never to waste food because there was people including children who went to bed hungry, because I simply had not understand this. The breakthrough for me came when an official from the national Civil Service Agency came to my boarding high school to talk to us about staying in school, going on to college, and selecting our majors carefully – taking into consideration how some fields of employment were so over crowded and others like agriculture and forestry were so emptied. Focusing on agriculture he said would help Liberia to fight against hunger - a situation that people could die from - coming to our land. I do not remember all that he said but I do remember what he said about people going hungry and possibly dying from hunger. I do remember that nothing about this made sense to me at 17. It was the most outrageous thing that I had heard of and it troubled me severely. I remember that I made the decision that day to throw out my list of “what –I- want- to- be- when-I-grow-up”, and to focus on majoring in agriculture, becoming the best scientist that I could, working hard and grabbing every opportunity to support an end to world hunger.

We have all heard the declaration of 2007/2008 that informed the world that we were in the midst of yet another world food crisis that was worsening. We were told that we must double global food production to feed a world population currently standing at 7 billion and that expected to rise to 9 billion by 2050 and we know now that we were not prepared at the time to meet the challenge. We know now that 200,000 were added to the world food demand; that with rising incomes and dietary changes for many would shift towards higher meat intake; that meat production is very demanding in terms of energy, cereal and water; that even than, almost half of the world’s cereals was being used for animal feed.

When it comes to the billions that are stuck in the poverty trap, we know that higher and volatile food prices – what seems as the “new normal” means that they can only cope by eating cheaper, less nutritious food which can have catastrophic life-long effects on their social, physical and mental well being.

A world food crisis does not just happen just happen. We do not just wake up one morning and realize that we are hit with a world food crisis or a global food shortage. What happens in fact is that we have warnings – countless warnings over periods long enough to do something to address the looming hunger crisis in poor countries and in areas with pockets of poverty in rich countries but we fail to take actions until the crisis hits. A good example of this is what happened around the 2007/2008 World Food Price Crisis. Led by the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and including world leaders and other world bodies concerned about hunger and food insecurity, calls for

action were made starting in mid 2007 to avert the impending world food crisis that could result from rising crop losses in many countries. Specifically, the call was for grants to enable farmers in poor countries where conditions for increased production were still possible, but where fertilizer, seeds and animal feed had risen in price by 90, 72, and 60 percent respectively. No actions were taken until the destitute and those excluded from the banquets of the rich as the FAO Director General put it, took to the streets to voice their discontent and despair, that support of food aid began to emerge. Food prices rise in 2007 led to an additional 50 million people around the world being classified as hungry.

When we consider the reality of poverty in today's world: a world where there is already enough food to feed every man, woman and child and where we continue to produce more and more food, but yet malnutrition, hunger and famine continue and even increase, placing millions of people in peril, where **1 billion people** live in poverty that is closely linked to injustice and exploitation; where the environment is being degraded, not only to support economic growth, but also to support the mere survival of the poor – we cannot wonder what is wrong with approaches used to address the issues?

After all those year of dealing with this subject, I have my list of answers to this question – a list that I know is in no way is exclusive.

1. There must be a New Deal for Agriculture where the right to adequate The right to adequate food for all is placed at the centre of the medium- to long-term responses to the current crisis. Agriculture has been a neglected sector for many years, in the definition of priorities both of official development assistance and of national governments, and in the lending policies of development banks. All actors must agree on the need to massively reinvest in agriculture, in order to make up for the shortsighted policies of the past. Agriculture is the most effective way to combat extreme poverty, particularly in agriculture-based countries.

2. Hunger must be correctly seen as a denial of a basic human right – the right to food. Hunger is exclusion - exclusion from the land, from jobs, wages, income, life and citizenship. When a person gets to the point of not having anything to eat, it is because all the rest has been denied. This is the desperation facing each and every one of the 870 million people in our world that are hungry today. Incorporating human rights principles into traditional development approaches may supply the “missing element” which has prevented over 50 years of development aid from overcoming hunger and poverty. The benevolence model of aid has not work. What works is a sustainable, enabling environment in which people can feed them selves. Empowerment is the key to doing this. A right-based approach can help not only achieve food security, but also to meet international poverty reduction goals, while simultaneously recognizing human dignity and the inherent worth of every individual

3. Investment in agricultural research systems must increase worldwide but especially so in Africa. We must support an agricultural research agenda that also focuses on rural women's needs for agricultural technologies, labor saving agricultural equipment and modern means of communication. In many parts of the world, Liberia and other countries in Africa being no exception, women work alongside men in the fields that provide nourishment and income for their families. They contribute to

commercial agriculture, which includes high value products such as vegetables. They make up over 60 percent of the total farming population but more often than not, women contribution to the agricultural sector go unrecognized. Few small-scale women's inputs are paid for their labor, and societal views of women's role restrict their inputs in household decision. Such beliefs also limit their access to land ownership, farm equipment, and credit – all of which are needed to be economically successful. These barriers ultimately inhibit women's ability to produce and can make it difficult for them to escape poverty or provide sufficient food for their families.

As I bring this address to a close, I like to leave you with thoughts that I end my own day with every day: We cannot end hunger by simply sealing off our comfort zones to the suffering and dying of the poor. Our world must adopt a right-based approach to freedom from hunger and find ways to help solve the problem in a holistic manner. We must understand that only by doing this will we achieve food security for all, meet international poverty reduction goals, and simultaneously recognize human dignity and the inherent worth of every individual. Tonight as every night, we must remember that 870 million women, men and children – human beings just like you and me, will go to sleep on an empty stomach. This will happen as we the “food secured lot empty perfectly good food into waste bins. The people would have endured yet another day of having a promise of adequate food for all and at all times, that was conceived in the 20th century, failing to come to fruition in the 21st contrary. Tomorrow morning, those that survive the night, will go on hoping and dreaming firstly, that somehow, they will find something to eat and with the energy to face another day, that they will be seen correctly, as people who face obstacles in fulfilling a fundamental human right – the right to a standard of food security that is necessary for human dignity.

Thank You.