

Opening Address

Bob Carr

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Opening Address

Senator the Hon. Bob Carr
Minister for Foreign Affairs



I am glad to be here to open this conference in the twenty-fifth year since the Crawford Fund was established.

I have just returned from the United Nations General Assembly in New York, where food security was, of course, of concern.

Around one in seven people in the world lack sufficient food — one billion people. The world must find a way to feed not only these people, but also the two billion more to be added to the world's population by 2050.

Recent crises in Africa show we have a long way to go. Over 18 million people are at risk of food insecurity in the Sahel region of West Africa (in Niger, Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Cameroon, Nigeria and The Gambia). More than one million children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition. That means stunting. That means learning disabilities. It means premature deaths. In the Horn of Africa, some 16 million people in Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and Rwanda do not have a reliable supply of food.

A great part of the challenge is how to better manage our resources. Improving food security globally will require a suite of measures. It is about aid, trade, investment and governance.

Our support for women is particularly important. Most food is consumed where it is produced; it is produced by smallholders, and most smallholder farmers are women. At the recent United Nations General Assembly Hillary Clinton emphasised this:

We must be focused on supporting women in agriculture, because women often do the work at every link of the agricultural chain: they grow the food, they store it, they sell it, and prepare it. So we must ensure that women get the support they need if we are serious about improving food security.

Women make up 43% of the agricultural work force worldwide, and as much as 70% in some countries. Often working longer hours than men, rural women are also the caregivers who look after children, the elderly and the sick. Many rural women are small business entrepreneurs and investors who dedicate most of their earnings to their families and societies.

So that is one thing we have to think about in any effort to feed the hungry. Women bear the greatest burden of food insecurity — but they also offer an important part of the solution.

Our aid program is working to address this. We have just established the first African office of the Australian International Food Security Centre, in Nairobi, Kenya. The new Centre is going to help Africans go from a reliance on emergency food aid to building a viable smallholder farming sector.

With a majority of smallholder farmers being women, this work will focus on them.

It is going to deliver research projects across eight countries in the south-eastern Africa region — Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. These are among the worst in Africa when it comes to accessing reliable sources of food. I am drawn to the simple smart approaches, and the long-term view here.

We are running a project to get farmers to grow trees on their farms. Crop yields can be doubled and livestock have better access to food if the right trees are planted and managed in the right way. This is already working, through an Australian-supported program in West Africa. By planting the right trees, farmers help grazing animals survive through the sometimes eight-month long dry season, feeding on leaves.

We are looking at ways to set up irrigation systems: getting reliable water into these parts of Africa will unlock agricultural potential.

We are looking at integrated farming — vegetable, poultry and cropping.

We have our own history of environmental challenges, insights into irrigation, into how to get the best out of our landscapes, sometimes learned the hard way. We are in a strong position to lead on this.

Doing great research, sharing it, applying it — that is what John Crawford was about. That is what will allow us to better manage our resources and build agricultural capacity and, ultimately, make sure everyone has enough to eat.

It is my pleasure to open the Crawford Fund's 2012 Annual Conference.

Australian Foreign Minister Senator the Hon. Bob Carr was sworn in to the Senate and Cabinet on March 13, 2012. Previously, he had been the longest continuously serving Premier in New South Wales history, elected in March 1995 and retiring from politics over 10 years later in 2005. As Premier, Bob Carr introduced the world's first carbon trading scheme and curbed the clearing of native vegetation as an anti-greenhouse measure. He was a member of the International Task Force on Climate Change convened by Tony Blair, and has received the World Conservation Union International Parks Merit Award for creating 350 new national parks. He is the author of *Thoughtlines* (2002), *What Australia Means to Me* (2003), and *My Reading Life* (2008).