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**SIR JOHN CRAWFORD MEMORIAL ADDRESS**

**Opportunities in the midst of  
the global food crisis**

Florence Chenoweth

*Paper prepared for presentation at the “Mining, Agriculture And Development:  
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## SIR JOHN CRAWFORD MEMORIAL ADDRESS

### Opportunities in the midst of the global food crisis

Hon Dr Florence Chenoweth  
Minister for Agriculture, Liberia



The Sir John Crawford Memorial Address has been presented since 1985, in honour of the distinguished Australian civil servant, educator and agriculturalist in whose name the Crawford Fund was established. Sir John Crawford was a remarkable Australian who contributed at the highest levels, and was a passionate supporter of international agricultural research for development.

Hon John Kerin, Chairman of the Crawford Fund; His Excellency Malcolm McCusker, Governor of Western Australia; His Excellency 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 honoured to join the group of sterling 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, adviser to the World Bank, Chancellor of the Australian National University, the man declared Australian of the Year, and so much more — many years ago. This happened as I sat in the Memorial Library of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with a young student, John Crawford from Sierra Leone, who was visiting a friend on campus from his home and had been given a temporary pass to use the institution's library for research purposes. John's friend introduced us and he asked me about his chances of being accepted to participate in the University's annual and popular Summer Institute for Young Researchers from Developing Countries.

Later as I went past John, I noticed a look of concern on his face as he stared at his computer 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 of others carrying the same name: 18 John Crawfords 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, Australia'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 Secure World. I wish to register my sincere thanks to the organisers of this year's conference for honouring 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 Midst of the Global Food Crisis', but I was given the option to centre my address on other areas that my research and work have focused on, including 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 refer to all of the topics because 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 seriously my mother's (who was 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 were people including children who went to bed hungry. I simply had not understood 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 overcrowded and others like agriculture and forestry were so empty. 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 2007–08 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 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, many would shift towards higher meat intake; that meat production is very demanding in terms of energy, cereals and water; that, even then, almost half of the world's cereals were being used for animal feed.

When it comes to the billions who are stuck in the poverty trap, we know that higher and volatile food prices — which seem the 'new normal' — mean 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. We do not just wake up one morning and realise 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 action until the crisis hits.

A good example of this is what happened around the 2007–08 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 support farmers in poor countries where conditions for increased production were still possible but where fertiliser, seed and animal feed had risen in price by 90, 72 and 60 per cent 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. Only then did support, in the form of food aid, begin to emerge. Food price rises 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 but wonder what is wrong with approaches used to address the issues.

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

1. There must be a New Deal for Agriculture where 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 who 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 worked. What works is a sustainable, enabling environment in which people can feed themselves. Empowerment is the key to doing this. A right-based approach can help not only achieve food security, but also meet international poverty-reduction goals, while simultaneously recognising human dignity and the inherent worth of every individual.

3. Investment in agricultural research systems must increase worldwide but especially in Africa. We must support an agricultural research agenda that also focuses on rural women's needs for agricultural technologies, labour-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 per cent of the total farming population, but, more often than not, women's contributions to the agricultural sector go unrecognised. Few are paid for their labour, and societal views of women's roles restrict their inputs into household decisions. 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 would like to leave you with thoughts with which I end my own day, 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 recognise human dignity and the inherent worth of every individual.

Tonight and 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.

Those people will have endured yet another day of having a promise of adequate food for all, and at all times — a promise conceived in the 20th Century — failing to come to fruition in the 21st Century. Tomorrow morning, those that survive the night will go on hoping and dreaming not only that somehow they will find something to eat and the energy to face another day, but also 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.

The Hon Dr Florence Chenoweth is the Minister for Agriculture in Liberia, and the winner of the Africa Prize 2011. Dr Chenoweth holds a Masters degree in agricultural economics and a PhD in land resources from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Her career has been devoted to improving the livelihoods and food security of women farmers in Africa. She joined the UN FAO as its representative in Gambia in 1995, opened the FAO's first office in South Africa, and in 2001 was the FAO liaison with the UN in New York City, serving as the link with the UN General Assembly until 2007. Recently, Dr Chenoweth implemented a Back to the Soil campaign in Liberia that enables rural women in female-headed households to receive at least 30% of needed farm inputs. The significant increase in food production has resulted in the World Food Programme buying rice from that country. Under her leadership, Liberia's Ministry of Agriculture is training rural women so they become self-sufficient in food production. Dr Chenoweth's Africa Prize distinguishes her as a role model not only to women but to all African leaders.

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