



# 36<sup>th</sup> Convocation

Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2015

**Tamil Nadu Agricultural University  
Coimbatore**



## *Acceptance Speech*

**Dr. Susan R. McCouch**

Professor, Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics,  
Cornell University, USA

**Dr. Pedro Medrano Rojas**

Former UN Assistant Secretary-General & Former Director,  
World Food Program, New York, USA.

**Thiru. Ashok Bakthavathsalam**

Chairman & Managing Director,  
K.G. Information Systems Pvt. Ltd., Coimbatore

**Acceptance Speech of Dr. Pedro Medrano Rojas  
on Conferment of Degree of Doctor of Science  
(*Honoris Causa*)**

**at the 36<sup>th</sup> Convocation of  
Tamil Nadu Agricultural University**

**August 17, 2015**

His Excellency, the Governor of Tamil Nadu and the Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Honourable Minister for Agriculture and Pro Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Vice Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Dr. K. Ramasamy, the Chief Guest Professor, Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics, Cornell University, USA, Dr. Susan R. McCouch, Chairman and Managing Director, K.G. Information Systems Pvt. Ltd., Coimbatore, Mr. Ashok Bakthavathsalam, Members of the Board of Management and the Academic Council, Faculty Members, Students, Representatives of the Media, other Dignitaries, Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to deeply thank Tamil Nadu Agricultural University for bestowing upon me the great honour of receiving the honorary degree of Doctor of Science during this 36<sup>th</sup> convocation here in Coimbatore today.

TNAU is among the world's leading Agricultural universities and its work has contributed to improving the

lives of millions of people, not only in Tamil Nadu but also in India and around the world.

In fact, a former student of this University and a son of Tamil Nadu, Professor M. S. Swaminathan, is worldwide known as the father of India Green Revolution and as an advocate of environmentally sustainable agriculture, sustainable food security and the preservation of biodiversity through an “evergreen revolution.” Thanks to his work, India became a country with a food surplus, and millions of people have been saved from famines and starvation. The work of Professor Swaminathan has inspired leaders around the world who fight to eradicate hunger and poverty.

The world was greatly encouraged by India’s success in multiplying food production and achieving food self-sufficiency. In 1996, the international community set the goal of reducing by half the number of hungry people in the world by 2015. I was the Chairman of the Committee on World Food Security which was responsible for preparing the World Food Summit in Rome at which the goal was set. Professor Swaminathan was there as a renowned expert, and although I did not know him then, I admired and respected his accomplishments.

Unfortunately, the target year of 2015 has arrived and the goal that was set in 1996 has not been met. There have been some setbacks. Now, the world knows that sustainable development and peace are not possible while people are hungry, and that it is economically self-destructive to ignore

hunger. We have seen that hunger, when left unchecked, contributes to civil wars, strike, massive migration and global instability.

About 10 years ago, I came to live and work in India as Representative of the World Food Program. In that role, I met and had the privilege of working with Professor M. S. Swaminathan and his Research Foundation.

We knew that there were three elements that make up food security: availability, access and absorption. That is, it is not enough to grow sufficient crops; you must also make sure that each person in India receives what he or she needs by means of efficient distribution, and that their bodies be able to absorb and biologically benefit from those nutrients.

One further refinement - and again, Tamil Nadu's native son, Professor Swaminathan, was at the forefront in calling attention to this globally - is the issue of nutrition and micronutrients. In addition to having an adequate quantity of food, it is of critical importance that a person have access to sufficient nutrients for a productive and healthy life, including protein, iron, iodine, zinc, Vitamin A, Vitamin B12 and other micronutrients.

As India had already become self-sufficient in food production in the Green Revolution, Professor Swaminathan and I, on behalf of the World Food Programme, focused on distribution, nutrition and micronutrients.

We undertook a detailed project. We prepared Food Insecurity Atlases of Rural and Urban India and The Sustainability of Food Security Atlas of India. These were meant to identify the areas of food insecurity in India in order to take effective action to banish hunger from the country, and as tools for the formulation of appropriate public policies.

In our food security atlases, we identified the “hot spots” of food or nutritional deficiencies, and called attention to the so-called “South Asia Paradox” where a generous food supply co-exists with high levels of child and maternal malnutrition. This joint effort attracted the attention of other countries that have since published similar atlases.

Nutrition security is the new goal: not just to address food security by increasing crop yield but also to attain nutrition security. Nutrition security involves paying concurrent attention to undernutrition, protein hunger and hidden hunger arising from inadequate consumption of micronutrients. It also involves access to clean drinking water, sanitation, primary healthcare and nutrition literacy. This is the challenge we have ahead of us.

We see as well heightened awareness of waste in the food supply chain: even where there is sufficient food production, much perishes before it can be consumed.

In addition, in addressing sustainable agriculture, there are issues of environmental degradation and now climate change.

It is extremely satisfying to see that this university, a leader in the field, is already focusing on these issues. TNAU has just undertaken a new All India Coordinated Project for Special Research in Food Quality, sanctioned by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, towards achieving the goal of food and nutrition security, with attention to nutritional food quality, combatting food waste, and sustainable production. This is extremely important work, and I congratulate you for your vision and dedication.

Now, at a global level, there is a renewed commitment to combat hunger that will need all of us. The 193 Member States of the United Nations recently reached an agreement which is expected to be adopted this September by world leaders at the Sustainable Development Summit in New York. Sustainable Development Goal #2 is to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.”

It is interesting to note that this Sustainable Development Goal is entirely in line with the criteria we developed when we prepared the Food Insecurity Atlases in India.

I would like to make a special plea to all the members of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, and especially to the students: dedicate yourselves to the achievement of these Sustainable Development Goals. As the Secretary General of the United Nations said, *“This is the People’s Agenda, a plan of action for ending poverty in all its dimensions, irreversibly, everywhere, and leaving no one behind.”*

I am convinced that Tamil Nadu Agricultural University is in a position to play a fundamental role in achieving these goals, and thus to make a substantial contribution not only to India but to all humanity. History gives us abundant evidence that sustainable nutritional security is a central condition for development and for reducing poverty, preventing environmental destruction, and reducing violence. In the work of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, you are not only feeding your neighbour but contributing to global stability and world peace.

In accepting this Doctor of Science (*Honoris Causa*) from Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, which is a high honour that profoundly moves me, I would like us to remember what Mahatma Gandhi said at Noakhali in 1946: "To the hungry, God is Bread; this God should prevail in every house and hut in the country." And I would add in the whole world.

**Many thanks!**



**Tamil Nadu Agricultural University**  
**Coimbatore**

Printed at : TNAU Offset Press, Cbe-3.