

Catholic research universities welcome agreement with UN agency over tackling world hunger

Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities President Professor Zlatko Skrbis has welcomed a new agreement between SACRU and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to address the world's food and health inequalities.

Professor Skrbis, who is also Vice-Chancellor and President of Australian Catholic University, said the new agreement between the alliance and FAO that was signed in Rome on 27 October aligned closely with the mission of the eight partner universities.

“Through this agreement, the eight Catholic universities that make up the Alliance will assist the United Nations in achieving three of the Sustainable Development Goals, namely Zero Hunger, Health and Well-being, and Reducing Inequalities,” Professor Skrbis said.

“The SACRU partnering universities, with our unique heritage as Catholic institutions, are committed to enhancing research for the common good, and to pass on our combined knowledge and expertise to advance humanity for good. The agreement with the UN's lead organisation for protecting the world's food and agriculture greatly aligns with our mission.”

The agreement between SACRU and FAO was signed by FAO Deputy Director-General Maria Helena Semedo and SACRU Vice President Professor Franco Anelli, Rector of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, which hosts the SACRU Secretariat.

FAO leads the United Nations' efforts to protect the food supply chain and prevent diseases from contaminated food, an issue that affects 600 million people worldwide each year.

A joint statement by SACRU and FAO said the agreement would “integrate different expertise to build capacity in food security, nutrition, and sustainable and resilient food systems at national and regional levels” as well as contribute to the outcomes of the UN's One Health approach.

Formally established in 2020, SACRU is a network of universities formed to support and facilitate multi-disciplinary cooperation and collaboration across areas of common research and teaching capability and interest to help consider and address some of the critical issues the world faces today. Aside from Australian Catholic University the other members of SACRU are, Boston College USA, Sophia University Japan, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore Italy, Catholic University of Portugal, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro Brazil, and Ramon Llull University in Spain.

One of the alliance's current projects responding to the issue of food security is a working group of professors and students in food engineering, food science, and biotechnology. This interdisciplinary group is looking into the best science for developing innovative food products. ACU Nutrition and Food Science lecturer Bo Wang is one of the partnering researchers of this group.

“ACU is proud to have researchers who are dedicated to investigating new and improved measures to ensure that famine and global food crises are eventually eliminated,” Professor Skrbis said.

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