

International Ministerial Meeting to Address the Drought Crisis in the Horn of Africa
Rome, 25 July 2011

Statement by Mr Jacques Diouf, FAO Director-General

Distinguished Ministers,
Honourable Delegates,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the request of the French Government, the current chair of the G-20, we have called this emergency ministerial meeting so that immediate steps can be taken to reverse one of the most serious human catastrophes facing the world.

It is imperative to halt the famine which, as I speak, is advancing in the Horn of Africa, in particular across southern Somalia. We must save lives and livelihoods and we must react to the emergency conditions to prevent them from getting worse. The combined forces of drought, inflation and conflict have created a catastrophic situation that requires massive and urgent international support. The United Nations System is seeking USD 1.6 billion over the next 12 months and USD 300 million urgently needed in the next two months to avert a deepening crisis. FAO estimates that USD 130 million is needed for immediate agricultural assistance, including USD 70 million for Somalia alone.

The experience of the Rome-based agencies, national governments and development partners has identified the most effective practices for dealing with crisis situations. We need to accelerate implementation of the strategies and investment plans adopted by the governments of the countries of the Horn of Africa, by vigorously strengthening agricultural development strategies focused on growth and national and international investment.

The people of the Horn of Africa have excelled in adapting their livelihoods to a harsh environment. More than any external intervention, it is the internal strength of such systems that marks the difference between life and death, security and destitution, stability and vulnerability.

The governments must stand on the frontline. With active support from the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and development partners, the governments of the region can achieve lasting results from dealing with this crisis.

Efforts to promote peace and stability in the region are critical, for this crisis is not the result of prolonged drought alone. It is essential to achieve peace so that people and livestock can move within countries and across borders to save lives and to preserve the foundations of food and nutrition security.

International solidarity with the countries and communities affected by the drought requires financial, technical and political support. Governments and international agencies have therefore started to provide assistance and emergency relief. FAO however sees a need for greater coordination. As members of the Inter Agency Standing Committee and the Food Security Cluster, FAO and WFP play their allotted role. They are committed to working with the IGAD, the African Union, and the humanitarian community in reinforcing emergency aid. In the framework of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), FAO and WFP will continue to support the countries' long-term investment plans, in partnership with IFAD and the High Level Task Force.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2000, faced with a major crisis in this same region, Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked me to chair the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force to address the structural causes of these recurring crises. The report *The Elimination of Food Insecurity in the Horn of Africa*, drawn up in collaboration with the governments and experts of the region, was approved. It is still accessible on the Internet.

In a second phase, a consultative group of the UN System and development partners was to mobilize the necessary investments. It was essential to counter the effects of irregular climate that remain serious, given that only 1% of arable land is irrigated in this region, compared to 7% in Africa and 38% in Asia. In addition, there are no rural roads to supply farmers with inputs or to send their products to markets.

Although a World Bank follow-up meeting was held in Nairobi in March 2001, the crisis had been averted and international attention turned to other priorities – and we are now back in a crisis management situation.

Must history always repeat itself? In the twenty-first century, must the international community experience the agonizing spectacle of human beings, especially children, and livestock dying as in Ancient Egyptian times?

The French Presidency of the G-20 took the bold and timely initiative of asking FAO to convene this meeting which I hope will enable us to save our brothers and sisters from dying of thirst and hunger.

I venture to hope that in the next years the international community, notably the G-20, will marshal its enormous resources so that, beyond the necessary measures we will be taking immediately, such tragic events are no more than a distant bad memory, as inputs will be available to farmers and herders, harvests will be properly stored and roads will be built, so that this region of the world no longer weighs on our collective conscience.

Thank you for your kind attention.