



**Statement of the Secretary General of the
League of Arab States**

To

The World Summit on Food Security

Rome, 16th – 18th November 2009



Mr Jacques Diouf, General Director of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
Heads of State —

Ladies and Gentlemen

In opening I would like to express special appreciation for my dear friend Jacques Diouf, and for everyone who participated in the preparations for this summit, the resolutions of which will, we trust, encounter the necessary concern and speedy implementation. We are convinced that the world is in a state that admits no delay, especially since negative developments are continuing, both as concerns the world financial crisis, and climate and environmental change, which come in addition to the threats facing the world food security situation.

I would like to emphasise that the League of Arab States and its specialised organisations, as some of the oldest members of the family of international and regional organisations, have already made this a matter of pre-eminent concern, and have co-operated and co-ordinated closely over the last few months with the Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development and with the United Nations Organisation for Food and Agriculture (FAO) to prepare this summit, with the aim of reaching resolutions to deal effectively with the world food crisis. The Arab world's interest in this summit arises from a deep understating of the pivotal role that sustainable agricultural development and food security play for 314 million Arab citizens.

At the March 2007 Arab Summit in Riyadh, the League of Arab States approved the Arab Sustainable Agriculture Development Strategy for the next two decades, and the initiative to



strengthen Arab co-operation to face the world food crisis, launching, in April 2008, the Emergency Programme for Arab Food Security, the principle components of which are: improving the productivity levels in current agriculture and investing more land resources to improve water returns and streamline the use of water for irrigation. This programme was approved during the Arab Social Economic and Development Summit in Kuwait in January 2009 when the need was reaffirmed to reinforce the autonomy of the Arab world in producing most of its own food needs and ensuring sufficient food for the Arab peoples, especially as regards the main food products.

Mr. President,

The Arab world represents around 10.26 percent of the entire surface area of the world, and 5.3 percent of its inhabitants. Its water resources represent 0.35 percent of renewable water sources in the world, and we use 80 percent of them. Around 90 percent of the area is within dry zones and the amount of land surface useable for agriculture is estimated at around 14 percent of the total. About 89.4 percent of available water in the Arab world is destined for agricultural use. Population growth in the Arab world is considered as among of the highest in the world and agriculture represents the main calling of the citizens of the Arab world, as 25 percent of people work in that sector. As for the food shortfall in the Arab world, in the year 2008 it reached 24 billion dollars, and it is expected to reach 27 billion dollars in 2010 as the population continues to increase.

To face all this, we have resolved to work on boosting agriculture and sustainable rural development. Thus we have begun to study how to achieve competent planning and better administration of land resources, reinforce the struggle against desertification and take preventative measures against any



waves of drought. We study and seek assistance in the development of water resources (from traditional and non traditional sources), in their administration, quality protection and correct use, as well as in the transfer of environmentally-friendly technology and capacity building. We also seek to ensure the competitiveness of Arab agricultural products and to ensure a balance between increased production and market services, to guarantee the information necessary for decision-making, to develop agricultural and marketing infrastructures, to stop degradation to the environment and natural sources and to support the role of the private sector and of the institutions of civil society.

The League of Arab States considers that the limitedness of natural resources requires the adoption of production and consumption models to guarantee the correct use of these resources. Furthermore, the conservation of non-renewable energy sources in the area requires the development and streamlining of those resources as well as discovering other varied sources in order to ensure sustainability in guaranteeing energy in the area. Furthermore, there is a need to attract capital towards agricultural environments within the Arab world through the improvement of the investment atmosphere in the agricultural sector, and neutralizing its dangers. This is in addition to the importance of increasing Arab co-operation and co-ordination with regional and international organizations, and with world States, in order to adapt to international, regional and technological changes.

Likewise there is a need to strike a balance between national, regional and global aspects in planning and implementing agricultural policies, and to reinforce the concept and culture of complementarity in exploiting Arab agricultural resources, bearing in mind the shared and reciprocal interests with other areas of the world, and not just the interest of one side.



In this context I would like to highlight certain basic points which, I feel, are clearly related to achieving and defending world food security.

1. It is truly deplorable that a world which has achieved such surprising advances in the fields of scientific research and modern technology, in the conquest of space, and in exploiting the resources of the seas, a world that has even found water under the surface of the moon ... that this world should be facing a terrible food crisis which has thrown a third of its inhabitants into the abyss of hunger, reducing them to poverty and want, and leaving them prey to sickness and epidemics.

2. If we agree that the principle requirements of man are food, clothing and shelter then, perhaps, we can agree that to deprive such a large number of the world's inhabitants of some or all of these basic needs means that we are administering a world economic system that has failed to ensure the fundamental needs of humanity, despite the fact that theoretical food resources in the world are sufficient for all.

3. From our point of view, this fact does not change because the world food crisis preceded the world financial crisis, for both of them are economic crises. They are links in a chain of highs and lows which has characterized the world economic system, and which has allowed some people to appropriate much more food and clothing than they need while the majority remain victim of poverty, hunger and sickness.

4. The theory that holds that the world's inhabitants have increased more than its resources must not lead us to view the relationship between people and resources as a simple arithmetic sequence. The relationship between inhabitants and resources is, above all, the result of policies that are perhaps unsound, or of



unjust planning. In this context, it must be said that the protectionist policies in the field of food production and agriculture practiced by the great defenders of free trade have caused poverty and malnutrition for many people. Furthermore, dedicating entire harvests to serving fuel production has led to a decrease in available foodstuffs just as the world saw an unprecedented increase in the request for food. These policies have led to great imbalance. It is not, therefore, necessary, to have recourse to dubious theories in order to justify the serious errors that threaten the world food security.

5. The worst aspect of the current international handling of the world food crisis is the double standards being applied. For many years hunger was left to kill hundreds of thousands of people in the heart of Africa, in the regions of Asia, and in some countries of South America. The cries of the victims and of those who defended them did not then find sufficient echo and or create real concern. Only when the prices of foodstuffs began to worry certain circles in some developed societies did talk of the world food crisis begin, as if it were something recent, or as if it were a plant without deep roots in the international terrain; something that requires radical change.

6. Resolution of the world food crisis must not bow to the limitations of world trade (or of anything else) without bearing in mind human and ethical values. Contractual obligations which govern the exportation of foodstuffs between two or more States, must not be confined to trade agreements and payments, but must also serve the principles to which the States have committed themselves in the framework of international conventions on human rights.

7. What really worries us is the serious fall in the effective value of aid for development of the agricultural sector, as well as its reduction as a percentage of total aid. To resolve this situation



we must not only increase aid, but use it to lay the foundations necessary to boost the agricultural sector and the food industry in developing countries, without compromising the aid necessary for other industrial and service sectors. Global development is a *sine qua non* condition to defeat the world food crisis.

8. We hope the G8 will honour the commitments for tackling the world food crisis it made during its last summit. We reiterate once again that this must come about in the context of a worldwide movement for reform which takes into account the points mentioned above, and that seeks a radical solution to the crisis in order to prevent its repercussions and guarantee they do not recur. This represents a guarantee for everyone: exporters, importers, industrialized nations and developing countries, as well as less developed countries of which some are in the Arab world. Indeed, this guarantees the security of international relations and maintains their stability.

9. The world food crisis must not stop us looking at the food ordeals and the fatal hunger which innocent people suffer because of occupation, aggression and embargoes. What happened in Sarajevo many years ago has not yet been forgotten by the world and was repeated in Gaza due to the siege, the deplorable results of which are recorded in UN reports and condemned in UN resolutions. Colonial occupation violates the most fertile agricultural lands and water resources of the Palestinians, also in the West Bank, thus threatening this entire people with a ferocious food crisis, not to mention the malnutrition and under-nourishment from which the Palestinians suffer.

10. The resolution of food crises must not be limited to ensuring mere quantity, but must also take account of quality. The increase of yield, even doubling it, through the use of



carcinogenic and unhealthy pesticides, and the export or import of such crops, is unacceptable and calls for drastic legislation and courageous political decisions. Moreover, the prices of food products must be kept under control, whatever the international situation, so that all people may have access to good and healthy food, and so continue their productive activities in the context of their national identity and of sound world governance.

Mr. President,

I conclude by underlining that we in the Arab world and in the League of Arab States are completely ready to collaborate in implementing the decisions of this summit, following a precise calendar which must not only be respected by the States and international institutions concerned, or by developing States, but must equally be respected by the industrialized States and by all relevant international and regional stakeholders in the field of food and agricultural all over the world.