

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE HAYNESLEY BENN OF BARBADOS

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR THE HONOURABLE HAYNESLEY
BENN, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AT THE FAO WORLD
SUMMIT ON FOOD SECURITY, TO BE HELD
16-18 NOVEMBER, 2009, ROME, ITALY**

Director General of the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), Honourable Heads of Governments, Government Representatives, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed a privilege and honor for me to make a statement on behalf of the Government and people of Barbados at this World Food Summit. In so doing, Mr. Chairman, I first wish to convey warm wishes from the Prime Minister of Barbados, the Rt. Hon. David Thompson, who had looked forward to participating but is unfortunately unable to attend this most important Summit.

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank the FAO on behalf of the Government of Barbados, for taking the initiative to convene this World Summit on Food Security. This forum presents an invaluable opportunity for Member countries to once again reaffirm their commitment to ensuring global food security, the alleviation of poverty and the reduction of those vulnerable persons across the globe who are afflicted by hunger. Moreover, this forum presents the opportunity for Member countries to translate the commitments which we have made in prior World Food Summits, into actionable strategies which will positively impact on the lives of everyone in the future.

Ladies and gentlemen, the clarion call for food security is one which is possibly the greatest ambition that we as a global society has ever endeavoured to achieved. **However, in order for us to successfully accomplish this laudable goal, food security must continue to be viewed as a right to be bestowed on all countries.** Therefore, increasing agricultural production, which is the most critical component in the fight towards food security, has to be a collective challenge that necessitates a global strategic approach. In their report, the FAO has indicated that at least US \$20 billion per annum is required to ensure that enough food is made available feed the people in the Latin American and Caribbean region by 2050.

As a Small Island Developing State that is constrained by its smallness of size and its insufficient endowment of large quantities of resources such as water and land for agriculture, Barbados is very cognisant of the pressing need to attain food security. During 2008, Barbados' national food bill alone was approximately US \$347 million. This total represented an increase by approximately **33 percent** over the country's food bill for the previous year. Moreover, our national trade statistics have indicated that since 2002, the value of food imports have increased at an average annual rate of **10 percent**.

These trends must mirror those of many of the Small Island Developing States that are also net food importing countries that are present here today.

It is in this regard that Barbados has opted to pursue a strategy of food sovereignty as oppose to the narrow policy scope of food security. This is since the concept of food security, which has been posited by many international

institutions, is believed to perpetuate the vulnerability of net food importing countries through policies slanted towards facilitating imports.

Instead, Barbados believes that greater efforts should be made towards the empowerment of net food importing countries through agricultural production strengthening, both at the primary production level as well as throughout the entire agriculture value chain. However, these activities will no doubt require the appropriate amount of investments.

It would be remiss of me at this juncture not to mention the valuable contribution that has been made thus far by the FAO and the Government of Italy in terms of the Food Security Programme that has been developed for the CARICOM region, which I am pleased to report, has now entered its second phase. The technical assistance provided by the FAO and the financial investments provided by the Government of Italy are indeed the first steps toward assisting the region to attain regional food security. I would wish to implore that the international donor community continues to support and facilitate the implementation initiatives and projects of this nature.

The FAO has also assisted the countries of the CARICOM region in the preparation of National Medium Term Priority Framework strategies in order to prioritise those programmes which will be needed in the medium-term to promote the growth of the regional agricultural sector. Subsequent to this, the FAO also assisted in convening a Donors' Conference to assist in sourcing funding from the various international organisations to operationalise the identified medium term projects, and an Agricultural Investment Forum to

mobilize additional resources to address the challenges of the Regional agricultural sector.

Although these initiatives are commendable, Barbados still strongly believes that opportunities exist, and must be explored, for securing agricultural investments in the region. This includes through foreign direct investment and grant funding where necessary, which are still required if the admirable goals of self sufficiency and food sovereignty can be achieved, at least in the key areas of food, which are necessary to alleviate poverty and maintain a path of sustainable growth.

Unfortunately, according to the World Investment Report 2009, foreign direct investment in agriculture in real terms has continued to decline. Additionally, the foreign direct investments that have been made in the recent past have been patterned in order for developed countries to concentrate on their own food security goals. The trend of investing heavily in those countries which possess an abundance of underutilised arable land and potable water is becoming more prevalent.

These occurrences are somewhat expected especially as the global economy is in the process of recovery, and the emphasis of most countries are on their national agendas. **However, we feel that this declining trend in foreign direct investments should not absolve countries from their commitments to provide developmental investments such as assistance in research and development.**

As it stands, there is an under-investment in research and development in agriculture throughout the Caribbean region. There is a need for technological

development and basic research geared towards biotechnologies and improved resource management. This is especially important as climate change continues to threaten the viability of the regional agricultural sector, and hence our food supply. Therefore, research on cultivars to mitigate the impact of climate change is of absolute importance, if activities towards food sovereignty are to be sustained.

With respect to the agricultural value-chain, investments in this area for Small Island Developing States is perhaps most critical. In Barbados for instance, our high imports of food which I mentioned earlier mainly consists of processed products. There is a lack of investment in the area of transforming primary goods made from indigenous commodities, into products which can compete with comparable goods from the industrialised countries. In this regard, Barbados therefore appeals for this area of investment and technical assistance to be actively considered as a necessary initiative in the promotion of food security for Small Island Developing States and net food importing countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, over the next few days I know that we will have the opportunity to engage each other in active debate over the strategies which are needed to promote food security at the global level. We will also have the chance to chart our way forward regarding global commitments. However, I wish to present to all of us here a challenge, that is, to craft a strategic direction and a declaration which is not merely based on rhetoric, but one which is full of meaning and realistically takes us successfully towards our new Millennium Development Goals. A strategic plan and declaration which rather than perpetuating the scourge of hunger, promotes definitive initiatives to eradicate it. A strategic plan that recognises the food security ambitions of Small Island

Developing States, and also that recognises the importance of facilitating investments in this regard.

Ladies and gentlemen, I look forward to the deliberations of this forum over the next few days and trust that at its conclusion, together we would have a clearly defined roadmap to assist the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in charting a course that leads to the fulfilment of its mandate to alleviate hunger and poverty, especially among the poorer of our nations.

I thank you.