

Statement of
His Excellency Mohammed Hosni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt

Before the Food and Agriculture Organization
High-Level Conference on
World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate
Change and Bioenergy

(Rome: 3 June 2008)

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Conference is being held while the world is experiencing difficult times, facing acute economic crisis, and subdued by sweeping inflationary waves and unprecedented price hikes of food, energy and commodities.

The current crisis poses several challenges that are interrelated in their economic, social and environmental dimensions, leading to serious repercussions on economic growth rates and standards of living in developed and developing countries alike.

Despite the intertwinement in the dimensions of this crisis and its causes, we have to acknowledge that its adverse repercussions, in large part, are rather borne by developing nations, and African countries in particular.

The issue of food security is the most serious aspect of this crisis and is badly affected by its negative impacts. Moreover, efforts made by developing countries towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be undermined. We have to recall that the reduction of poverty and hunger was the first among the MDGs that we adopted eight years ago.

Today, we are meeting at this important conference and the issue of food security is facing a formidable challenge posed by the steady

rises in the prices of commodities. Today, grain stocks have been drawn down to its lowest levels since the seventies.

The FAO had called for increasing the grain stocks from (14% to 19%) of the total world production. While we realize the ingenuity of this proposal in the long run, its short-term repercussions are likely to exacerbate the current crisis and engender further tensions on the demand side, thus additionally scaling up prices.

We are meeting today while this crisis is continuing to cause more economic bottlenecks and social tensions in many of the world's developing countries, in addition to its repercussions on FAO activities, the World Food Program (WFP) and the agriculture negotiations within the World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha Round.

Our visions regarding the causes of the current crisis and the means to overcome it may differ, but what brings us together is the conviction that we are facing a global phenomenon that requires global action to address it and contain its negative implications.

We would like to welcome the establishment of the food crisis task force set up by the UN Secretary-General and look forward to the conclusion of a strategy that maps future directions to meet the global challenges posed by the food crisis. However, the matter – as we see it – requires widening the scope of our dialogue beyond in-house and off-shore bounds of the UN, to include the Bretton Woods Institutions, the WTO and the Regional Organizations both in the developed and developing countries.

The world is facing a common challenge. We are witnessing the intersection of issues of food security, energy security, water as well as their connections with climate change and bioenergy, with all the complexities and options involved.

This conference is not a forum for exchanging accusations between developing and developed countries, nor it is one for laying the blame for the current crisis on one side or the other; but rather it is an opportunity for dialogue and formulation of a global partnership that addresses this common challenge.

I am calling today for a global partnership, one that deals with the causes and repercussions of the current crisis to achieve the interests of developing and developed countries. A global partnership that would surpass the narrow national scope of policies, orientations and interests, dealing with the issue of food security within the more comprehensive humanitarian scope and its association with the inalienable human right to food and life. A global partnership that witnesses concerted efforts on the national, regional, and international levels, one that contains the current crisis and curtails the ceaseless rise in food prices.

I am renewing my call for an urgent international dialogue that I called for in my statement before the World Economic Forum, held in Sharm El Sheikh last month. A dialogue by which food and energy exporters and importers from developed and developing countries huddle to lay out an international strategy for the short, medium and long-term handling of the current crisis. A dialogue that proposes

solutions to the needs of world population with regard to food as well as traditional and clean energy supplies; solutions that we all agree on and commit to.

An international dialogue based on common interests and mutual dependence, one that warns of the speculation risks pertinent to agricultural commodity prices, one that reinforces the efforts to promote the development of the agriculture sector in fields of land reclamation, boosting productivity, and encourages the infrastructure needed for transporting and stockpiling crops. A dialogue that bolsters and energizes scientific research in the field of fertilizers and new seed varieties, one that scrutinizes the effects of genetically modified seeds on sanitary and phyto- sanitary, human, as well as animal health.

It is a dialogue that confronts climate change challenges seriously and effectively in its relationship with prevailing consumption and production patterns, and their grave repercussions on drought and land desertification, and their direct consequences on the world's food security.

It is a dialogue that sets an international code of conduct that reconsiders the current expansion in the production of biofuel as an alternative source of traditional energy. An international code that sets standards for the responsible utilization of agricultural crops, as food for human beings, not as fuel for engines; a code that reassesses the actual social and environmental costs of biofuel, and restricts its production to agricultural waste and designated crops such as

"Jatropha", while steering clear of humankind's food. An urgent and serious dialogue that reconsiders the current subsidization offered to ethanol and bio-diesel producers, and subjects it to rules of world trade, a subsidization that is creating hazardous distortion to the present international system of agriculture trade.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Egypt is facing the repercussions of the current crisis, thanks to an economy strengthened by steps of reform and a wide-based network of social security.

While reviewing the dimensions of this crisis and calling for an international dialogue and global partnership to contain and get over it, I am not prompted by points of departure relevant to Egypt's sufferings, as we are all partners – at one level or another- in these sufferings. My motivation stems from the conviction that we are all in the same trench, we all live in the same world, face the same challenges and aspire to a better future for our countries and peoples, and for a better world with prosperity for all.

Thank you

May God's peace and blessings be upon you all.