

**STATEMENT BY THE NORWEGIAN MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, MR ERIK SOLHEIM, AT THE FAO HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON FOOD SECURITY: THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIOENERGY, ROME, 3–5 JUNE 2008**

I would like to begin by thanking FAO for convening this meeting, and the Secretary-General for upgrading the meeting to a summit to address the global food crisis.

In some ways, the world is now a victim of its own success. Economic growth in many developing economies is perhaps the most important factor behind increased food prices. Millions can finally afford to eat better, and this provides a welcome opportunity for individual farmers as well as economic growth in many countries. We should not lose sight of this.

However, this is not much comfort to those who can no longer afford their daily bread.

As we have seen over the past few months, the increased risk of hunger means an increased risk of violence, crime and social unrest. Political instability and even the breakdown of governments could follow.

We must act now to prevent such situations from arising. I would in particular urge the UN and other actors in post-conflict situations to take a comprehensive approach, where security, mediation and support to political processes are integrated with humanitarian assistance and longer-term development measures.

We must prevent the food crisis from adding to the burden of fragile post-conflict states and pushing them back into conflict. We must do everything we can to prevent the millions lifted out of poverty over the last couple of decades from sliding back into misery. We must target our actions at the most needy – often those suffering in silence – not the vocal middle class.

In our eagerness to act quickly, we must make sure that actions taken now do not have negative consequences in the long term. For example, when we distribute fertilizer and seed as part of our response, no concessions can be made to proper analysis. Each intervention must be put in a larger context. FAO has, for instance, drawn up excellent guidelines for seed aid. We must make sure they are used.

I welcome the timely leadership shown by Kofi Annan in launching the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. Increased productivity is clearly required to meet the needs of a growing global population. Particularly in Africa, which has not enjoyed the increase in productivity seen in other parts of the world.

But increased productivity is of little value to the African farmer if she cannot get her products to a functional market. Part of the answer to the crisis is to be found in the traditional development toolbox: infrastructure, improved governance and conducive economic policies.

In our efforts to increase production, we must not back down on our principles of environmental sustainability. These efforts must not lead to loss of genetic resources for food and agriculture, including minor crops of importance for food security, and they must not cause pollution or depletion of scarce water resources. Land tenure and property rights are another critical issue.

I regret having to repeat yet again that women are the backbone of agriculture in the developing world. We will not succeed unless everything we do takes this into account.

The private sector has to be a driver for agricultural development. We have to think outside the box in order to attract responsible private sector engagement. I firmly believe in encouraging and facilitating public-private partnerships.

Ten days ago I visited drought-stricken areas of Australia. The drought has taken a devastating toll. We have spent too much time discussing what the consequences of future climate change may be. Go to Australia and see for yourself. Climate change is taking place here and now, and it has to be dealt with.

Climate change is perhaps the greatest threat to food security. If we fail to place combating climate change at the very top of our food security agenda, we will be seriously neglecting our responsibility. Our efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will help us in the long term, but not immediately. In the meantime, adaptation to climate change is paramount.

Production of biofuels has turned into a controversial issue in the debate on climate change. I don't think the issue is about yes or no to biofuels. I think it is about doing things the right way - to maximize the positive contributions of biofuels and minimize their possible negative effects, including for food prices. But the criteria for how to do this in a sustainable manner are yet to be developed. As also alluded to by the Minister of Agriculture of the People's Republic of China yesterday, we believe that we need to initiate an intergovernmental UN process to develop a set of agreed principles and criteria for sustainable production and use of biofuels.

In this context, I note with interest the proposal of Prime Minister Zapatero of Spain for a follow-up to this meeting to agree on further concrete measures. At such an occasion, we would benefit from the final proposal for a Comprehensive Framework for Action being developed by the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, as well as other initiatives to develop concrete response measures.

Before closing, I would like to briefly reflect on the fact that we are gathered here in Rome to address food security and hunger. Regrettably, this is not the first time. World leaders were gathered here 34 years ago with the same issue on the agenda. Let me quote from the final paragraph of the declaration adopted back then:

“Time is short. Urgent and sustained action is vital.”

This time around, we do not have another 34 years at our disposal. Somehow, we have to break the circle now.