



UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



XXXXXXXXXXXX **Statement by Louise Arbour United Nations High
Commissioner for Human Rights
To the High Level Conference on World Food
Security: The Challenges of Climate
Change and Bioenergy** XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX



Rome, 4 June 2008

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for inviting me to this High-Level Conference on World Food Security and congratulate the organizers and sponsors for their very timely initiative. Few issues speak as forcefully as the food crisis about individual human rights and the need for collective action. Sixty years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognized that access to food is a right and an indispensable precondition for the welfare of every human being. Since then, States have reiterated such position and made legal commitments to work jointly and in their individual capacity towards realizing freedom from hunger for all.

On May 22, the Human Rights Council held a Special Session on the food emergency during which States underscored the need to place the protection of human rights at the very centre of our analyses and responses to the crisis.

A human rights framework examines and confronts the deeply rooted obstacles that hinder people's ability to produce or obtain food. It helps to clarify the power imbalances inside and between countries that trigger or exacerbate the food crisis, including unfair trade practices or skewed policies involving incentives and subsidies. Such an approach contributes to identify the additional critical vulnerabilities and disproportionate impact of the food crisis on those individuals and groups that already suffer from discrimination and a denial of rights. Human rights principles call for the empowerment of people to secure their own access to food through the full participation of those most affected, either directly or through their representative organizations.

Food insecurity is often compounded by warfare, bad governance, and natural disasters. In such cases, it becomes painfully evident that we cannot always rely on the willingness and ability of national authorities to discharge their obligations towards people in need. Not surprisingly, governments that commit or turn a blind eye to gross violations of human rights are also the most likely to disregard their duties and responsibilities. Long-standing

international tolerance for human rights abuses allows both the obstruction of international assistance when a need arises as well as the hindrance of corrective international efforts in the long term.

Excellencies,

Human rights law supports the adoption of national strategies to ensure food and nutrition security for all. States also have a responsibility under the UN Charter and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to confront the current food crisis through international cooperation in ways that respect human rights without discrimination.

Moreover, a human rights-based approach will bolster our capacity to monitor the effects of the crisis and our response to it. Human rights mechanisms, such as the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, UN human rights treaty monitoring bodies, such as the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and regional human rights systems can assist both in collecting information and fine-tuning remedies. Human rights indicators can help to measure not only the overall gravity of the crisis, but just as importantly, its disparate impact on different groups, and the effectiveness of our responses in reaching all equitably.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For these reasons, I wish to underscore the crucial role that FAO has played in encouraging the insertion of human rights considerations into national food security policies. Thank you for including me in this gathering.

Thank you.