

**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER OF
SWAZILAND MR. ABSALOM THEMBA DLAMINI ON
THE OCCASION OF THE HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
WORLD FOOD SECURITY: THE CHALLENGES OF
CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIOENERGY, ROME, 3-5
JUNE, 2008.**

MR CHAIRMAN,

YOUR EXCELLENCIES HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT,

YOUR EXCELLENCY FAO DIRECTOR-GENERAL,

DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 MR. CHAIRMAN, ON BEHALF OF MY DELEGATION AND INDEED ON MY OWN BEHALF I WISH TO EXPRESS MY SINCERE GRATITUDE FOR THE WARM WELCOME ACCORDED TO US BY BOTH THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE FAO SECRETARIAT SINCE OUR ARRIVAL IN THIS HISTORIC CITY OF ROME.

1.2 I HAVE THE HONOUR TO DELIVER THIS STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF HIS MAJESTY KING MSWATI III WHO COULD NOT PERSONALLY ATTEND DUE TO OTHER IMPORTANT COMMITMENTS.

2. THE SOARING FUEL PRICES

2.1 MR. CHAIRMAN, THE CONFERENCE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN CONVENED AT AN OPPORTUNE TIME WHEN THE WHOLE WORLD IS GRAPPLING WITH THE DRAMATIC INCREASES IN THE PRICE OF FOOD AND OTHER ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES.

2.2 LIKE OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, THE KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND IS ALSO EXPERIENCING SUCH UNPRECEDENTED INCREASES IN FOOD PRICES. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS COMES AT A TIME WHEN THE COUNTRY IS STILL GOING THROUGH A LENGTHY DROUGHT PATCH THAT HAS HAD A DEVASTATING EFFECT ON THE COUNTRY.

2.3 THE RAPID RISE OF CRUDE OIL IN THE WORLD MARKET HAS NOT MADE THE SITUATION ANY BETTER. INSTEAD, IT HAS REGRETTABLY SHOT UP

THE COSTS OF PRODUCTION WHICH HAS RESULTED IN THE UNFORTUNATE PREDICAMENT OF HIGH FOOD PRICES, IN WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES TODAY.

2.4 UNDER SUCH CHALLENGING SITUATIONS, VULNERABLE ECONOMIES LIKE OURS EASILY GET AFFECTED THUS PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE LIMITED GOVERNMENT RESOURCES AS THE NUMBERS OF HELPLESS CITIZENS' INCREASE.

3. DROUGHT CONDITIONS

3.1 MR. CHAIRMAN, YOUR EXCELLENCIES,
AS I HAVE ALREADY ALLUDED, FOR MORE THAN A DECADE MY COUNTRY HAS BEEN EXPERIENCING

PERSISTENT DROUGHT SPELLS WHICH INDEED IS ATTRIBUTED TO CLIMATE CHANGE.

3.2 IN SOME PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, WATER TABLES HAVE DRIED UP RESULTING IN WATER RATIONING IN URBAN CENTRES WITH EVEN WORSE SITUATIONS IN RURAL AREAS WHERE SOME RIVERS HAVE DRIED UP. TO ALLEVIATE THE SUFFERINGS IN THE RURAL AREAS, GOVERNMENT WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF NGO'S HAS HAD TO SUPPLY WATER TO THE AFFECTED COMMUNITIES.

3.3 FURTHERMORE, THE DROUGHT SITUATION HAS ACCELERATED THE LAND DEGRADATION PROBLEM WHICH IS CHARACTERISED BY RAMPANT SOIL EROSION AND AGGRESSIVE INVASION OF ALIEN PLANT SPECIES WHICH HAS DESTROYED GRAZING

LANDS. IN RESPONSE TO SUCH AN INVASION, GOVERNMENT HAS SET ASIDE RESOURCES TO ERADICATE THESE SPECIES, EFFECTS OF WHICH HAD BEEN DECLARED A NATIONAL DISASTER.

4 **RAPID INCREASE IN INPUTS PRICES**

4.1 YOUR EXCELLENCY, THE ESCALATION IN THE PRICE OF OIL HAS RESULTED IN A PARALLEL INCREASE IN THE PRICE OF MOST AGRICULTURAL INPUTS, IN PARTICULAR SEEDS, FERTILIZERS, ANIMAL FEED, TRACTOR HIRE CHARGES AND OTHER FACTORS OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION. AS A RESULT A LARGER PORTION OF THE FARMING COMMUNITY, IN PARTICULAR SMALL HOLDER FARMERS CANNOT AFFORD TO BUY ALL THE NECESSARY FARM INPUTS.

4.2 IN THIS REGARD, ON BEHALF OF HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT, I WISH TO EXPRESS MY SINCERE GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION TO FAO AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS INCLUDING NGOS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE PURCHASE AND SUPPLY OF FARM INPUTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

5. WHAT IS THE COUNTRY DOING TO ADDRESS THE FOOD PRICE CRISIS?

5.1 THE DECLINING PRODUCTIVITY OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN THE COUNTRY NECESSITATED THE HOLDING OF THE NATIONAL

AGRICULTURAL SUMMIT, LAST YEAR WHICH WAS ATTENDED BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS. IN THE SUMMIT, STRATEGIES TO REVAMP THE SECTOR WERE FORMULATED AND I AM PLEASED TO INFORM THIS AUGUST ASSEMBLY THAT GOVERNMENT HAS STARTED IMPLEMENTING SOME OF THE SUMMIT RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.2 IN THE SHORT TERM, GOVERNMENT HAS SET UP A COMMITTEE OF TECHNICAL EXPERTS THAT REPORT TO CABINET, TO ANALYSE THE FOOD CRISIS AND THEN RECOMMEND MITIGATION MEASURES.

5.3 IN THE MEDIUM TERM, GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING STRATEGIES, INCLUDING INTERVENTION IN SOME PRODUCTION COSTS, IN ORDER TO ASSIST FARMERS TO INCREASE FOOD

PRODUCTION IN THE NEXT CROPPING SEASON. AS SUCH, THIS FINANCIAL YEAR GOVERNMENT HAS SET ASIDE FUNDS TO IMPLEMENT SOME OF THESE INTERVENTIONS, PARTICULARLY WATER CONSERVATION AND IRRIGATION.

5.4 FOR THE MEDIUM TO LONG TERM, GOVERNMENT IS UNDERTAKING STRATEGIC RESEARCH TO COME UP WITH SUITABLE CROP VARIETIES AND LIVESTOCK SPECIES. THE CHALLENGE HOWEVER, IS UPGRADING OUR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH STATION SO AS TO GENERATE NEW TECHNOLOGIES WHICH ARE IN LINE WITH THE CHANGING CLIMATIC CONDITIONS.

6. APPEAL FOR ASSISTANCE TO FAO AND OTHER DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

6.1 YOUR EXCELLENCY, THESE ADVERSE CONDITIONS SUCH AS DROUGHTS AND FLOODS CAN ONLY BE OVERCOME BY COOPERATION BETWEEN ALL OUR GOVERNMENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS PARTNERS LIKE THE FAO.

6.2 IN CONCLUSION, WE THEREFORE LOOK UPON FAO AND OTHER DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS TO HELP US ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES WE ARE FACING TO REVAMP THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR WHICH IS KEY TO OUR ECONOMY. WITH SUCH PARTNERSHIP WE CAN BE ABLE TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION.

I THANK YOU!