

**FAO High-Level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate  
Change and Bioenergy**

**Speech by James A Michel, President of the Republic of Seychelles**

**Rome, 3 June 2008**

Your Excellency, Mr Prime Minister of the Italian Republic,  
Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,  
Mr Secretary General of the United Nations,  
Mr. Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

This is a gathering of the fortunate of this world! Yesterday we had lunch, last night, dinner, and today breakfast and then lunch again. What is perfectly normal for us is beyond the reach of millions of people. At this very moment when we are gathered to talk of food security in this city of plenty, millions of our fellow human beings haven't had a square meal, nor can they begin to hope when they will have one. Hunger, starvation and malnutrition are their lot. They are the greatest afflictions of human society. Together, they make a mockery of human dignity. They make a mockery of humanity's most basic need and its most basic right: the right to adequate food.

As events unfold and demonstrate on a daily basis, food security has become humankind's foremost concern. It is at the core of our very survival. Whilst food accounts for just 10 per cent of expenditure in households in the developed world, it can account for as much as 80 percent of expenditure in the Developing World. The recent surge in grain prices has led to huge increases in the price of bread, milk, meat and other commodities. More than ever, the threat of starvation on a global scale looms. With it looms the prospect of violent upheavals.

Food security, climate change and – more recently – bioenergy are closely linked.

We are all familiar with climate change, but none more so than the inhabitants of small island states. We, islanders, know full well the meaning of climate change. We have experience of it through our islands which are disappearing, through changing weather patterns, through the dwindling of our fish stocks upon which we depend for our livelihood...

With the exception of fish, we are net importers of food. Fish – our blue gold - may seem abundant, but persistent over-harvesting and illegal fishing resulting from the growing global trade in seafood is eroding food security in our small islands. Nor are we reaping the proper benefits from our blue gold! Some 380,000 tons of tuna are caught and transshipped from the Seychelles Exclusive Economic Zone every year, mostly by EU countries. This is worth 3.8 billion euros on the international market. The revenue that Seychelles derives from this in licence and transshipment fees is a mere 15 million euros. Is this fair? Is this just? We are unequal partners in this global trade. As long as the terms

of global trade – free trade, as we are wont to call it – remain skewed, developing countries will continue to suffer deprivation.

Combined with the scarcity of land and the effects of climate change such as land degradation, land salinization from sea level rise and extended droughts, agriculture on small islands has also suffered serious setbacks, worsening an already heavy reliance on food imports.

Faced with this situation, we are refocusing our food security strategy towards increasing agricultural output, reducing administrative bottlenecks, stimulating private sector investment in the sector, and encouraging better use of technology and adaptation to climate change to improve yields. However, we cannot achieve this goal without the support of the international community. In this context, I welcome the decision of the UN Secretary General to establish a United Nations Task Force on the Global Food Crisis. It is vital that the work of the task force is not submerged by resolutions, but enlightened by solutions.

We should also address the fundamental issue of the global energy crisis which is inextricably linked to the world food crisis. You cannot solve one without solving the other. May I, therefore, suggest that the mandate of the Task Force be extended to consider the global energy crisis? In the same context, I would like to propose that a high-level conference be convened on this issue which is a matter of grave concern to all of us. Let us seriously look at helping poorer countries in developing alternative sources of energy – hydropower, solar and wind energy, etc.

I would ask the Task Force to consider the special case of small island states when proposing solutions to this crisis. I would ask them to take into consideration our vulnerabilities. The price of food in Seychelles and other small islands is escalating beyond the means of island people, essentially forcing many of us back into poverty. We have implemented various measures to alleviate the hardship brought about by the global increase in food prices, but we are slowly running out of options. This is why we cannot procrastinate. We need to agree today on a series of concrete measures to address the global food crisis and avert a catastrophe.

We also need to recognize that the increasing demand for biofuels from grains is compounding the crisis, causing yet more misery and suffering. Consumerism imposes its own dictates and its casualties are the poor of the Developing World. They go hungry so that we can have more fuel for our cars!

Let us put an end to the practice of double-talk! We can resolve the food crisis if we really want to, if the political commitment is there. The industrialized countries could start by cutting down on subsidies which they give to their farmers. Then we could address the issue of resources and infrastructure. The simple fact is that food will not come to us unless we grow it, unless we produce it. And to produce food you need resources – seeds, fertilizers, technology etc. Whilst the vast majority of developing countries have the land, they don't have the resources. The industrialized countries could

assist by putting resources at the disposal of the South and by helping to improve our infrastructure. Provide us with the resources and the infrastructure for us to produce food; help us to feed ourselves!

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The immediate challenge facing us is how to bring adequate food at affordable prices to ordinary people. In the past months we've seen riots in some countries caused by soaring food prices. We have seen at least one government fall and major food-producing countries imposing export bans. Sadly, we have seen the hungry get hungrier, more desperate and angrier. The divide between rich and poor is widening by the day. If we do not act now, it will create more refugees in search of basic human needs – food and shelter. It is not only the future generation that we will have answer to, but also the present one, if we leave this conference with just empty promises.

I thank you.