

**Statement by FAO Director-General, Jacques Diouf, for the launch of new hunger figures
Joint FAO/WFP/IFAD Press Conference**

FAO headquarters, Rome, 14 September 2010

Our dear friends from the media,
Ladies and Gentleman,

It is with pleasure that I welcome you to FAO for this press conference on the new hunger figures. I am glad to have by my side Ms. Josette Sheeran, WFP Executive Director, and Ms. Yukiko Omura, IFAD Vice President.

FAO's latest estimates indicate that 925 million people will be hungry and malnourished in 2010. While this figure marks an improvement compared to last year's spike in world hunger of 1 billion persons, there is no cause for complacency. At close to one billion, hunger is and remains unacceptable. A child dying every six seconds because of undernourishment related problems is the world's largest tragedy and scandal.

The expected decline in world hunger in 2010 is primarily a result of better access to food as the global economy recovers and food prices remain below their peak levels of mid 2008.

But let me clearly state that despite the expected decline, the achievement of the international hunger reduction targets is at serious risk. The figures speak for themselves. The current number is higher than the level that existed when world leaders agreed to reduce the *number* of hungry by half at the World Food Summit in 1996. To meet the first MDG on hunger reduction, the prevalence of hunger in developing countries needs to be reduced to 10 percent by 2015. That means the *proportion* of hungry people has to drop by 6 percentage points in 5 years while it decreased by 4 percentage points in 19 years. The same arithmetic applies to the World Food Summit target: while the number of hungry people should be halved by 2015 to about 420 million, it has instead increased as the latest data show. A drop of 500 million is needed over the next 5 years in order to meet the WFS target.

On the eve of the MDG Summit in New York next week it should be clear that at 925 million, the level of hunger makes it extremely difficult to achieve not only the first MDG but also the rest of the MDGs.

It is therefore very clear that only swift, resolute and concerted international action can enable us to honour our commitments and move towards wiping hunger off the face of the earth as we have repeatedly pledged to do.

What is the solution? What should be done?

The rapid increases in hunger following the price spikes in 2007-2008 and the financial and economic crisis reveal the fragility of the food system and show the extreme vulnerability and precarious conditions of countries and people.

However, the problem of hunger goes beyond sudden shocks and crises. It is a structural one. The fact that nearly one billion people remain hungry today in spite of relatively lower food prices and better economic prospects points to a deeper, well-entrenched problem that necessitates purposeful action at massive scale.

The current dramatic situation is the result of neglect of agriculture in development policies over the past three decades. It is time to tackle the root causes of food insecurity by adopting lasting political, economic, financial and technical solutions. We know what should be done and how to do it. Success stories do exist in Africa, in Asia and in Latin America. These experiences need to be scaled up and replicated.

In addition to improving safety nets and social protection programmes to reach those most vulnerable and in need, the long-term solution to food security is investing in agriculture in developing countries so they can produce the food needed for a world population expected to exceed 9 billion in 2050. In this regard, stable and effective policies, regulatory and institutional mechanisms and functional market infrastructures that promote investment in the agricultural sector are paramount.

The reformed Committee on World Food Security (CFS) which will meet next month opens new opportunities for dialogue and coherence in policy and action among all relevant actors in the fight against hunger. We should not miss such opportunity.

Are we facing a new food price crisis?

Let me briefly comment on the current turmoil on world food markets.

Despite the expected shortfall in world cereal production, the market fundamentals are sound and very different from the situation in 2007/2008. Although lower than previously anticipated, global cereal production in 2010 will still be the third highest ever recorded. In addition, and unlike the situation in 2007/2008, stocks are larger. FAO, therefore, considers the supply situation of cereals as adequate.

However, there are obvious reasons for concern as markets remain nervous and therefore vulnerable to any sudden shock. The current turbulence in world food markets are a warning sign that volatility is likely to increase in the future. Larger price volatility combined with the recent increase in food prices, if it persists, will create additional obstacles to reduce hunger.

FAO is naturally monitoring the situation very closely.

The CFS, next month, will discuss ways for countries to work together to mitigate the impact of increased risk and volatility.

The “1billionhungry” Project

Besides all the policy and technical assistance we provide to our member countries, we have engaged in a strong advocacy effort. Last May, I launched an international initiative – the “1billion hungry” project to rally public opinion and incite world leaders and policy makers to take urgent action against hunger.

Up to now, 700 thousand signatures have been collected and I am confident that we will reach our goal of one million by the year end.

So I would ask, if you haven’t already done so, to sign your names to the online petition that you can access through the FAO website, and thus to make your own small contribution to banishing hunger from all of our lives – from the lives of the 925 million who live with it, and from the lives of those, like me, who cannot live with it. I also hope that I can count on your commitment to rally support to this campaign.

I thank you for your kind attention.