

Address by President
Zine El Abidine Ben Ali
President of the Republic of Tunisia
to the FAO High-Level Conference on
*"World Food Security : The Challenges
of Climate Change and Bioenergy"*

Delivered on his behalf by
Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi
Prime Minister

Rome, June 3-5, 2008

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct honor to convey to you the greetings of
H.E. President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the
Republic of Tunisia, and to deliver, on his behalf, his address
to this Conference.

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Mr. Chairman of the Conference,
Your Excellencies,

Mr. Secretary General of the United Nations,

Mr. Director General of the Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to address this important UN conference which confirms, once again, the international community's awareness of the need for solidarity and effective cooperation in order to eradicate hunger and address its causes, in light of the challenges posed by climate change, and the rise of the prices of energy and basic food products, with their serious impacts on the human condition in many regions of the world.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all who have contributed to organizing this important meeting and providing adequate conditions for its success. Special thanks are due to Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, to Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, as well as to the President, Government and people of the Republic of Italy for playing host to this international meeting.

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,

The objective we set in the World Food Summit and in the Millennium Summit, concerning the improvement of the world's food security situation, is one of the most important challenges that we have to meet. For the right to food lies at the core of the right to life, and no dignity and no stability can be preserved unless food is provided to all.

No doubt, the continuous and unprecedented rise of oil prices, with its direct impact on the costs of production, storage, conditioning and distribution of basic food products, particularly cereals, dairy products and fodder, now ranks in the forefront of everybody's concerns. These concerns grow even more intense as a result of the increasing production of bioenergy, often at the expense of food production, with the resulting decrease of the world's stocks of basic food products. This raises the fear of further deterioration of the food situation, particularly in poor countries, and the propagation of speculative and monopolistic practices in the related international commercial deals.

Most experts, in fact, fear that these new realities will persist for a long period, given the phenomenon of climate change whose parameters are confirmed from one season to the other through various indicators, the most conspicuous of which being the shrinking of the ice cap, the rise of temperatures in the northern hemisphere of the Globe, the phenomenon of global warming, and the rising frequency of floods and natural disasters.

In the face of the serious risks that threaten the sector of agricultural production in all parts of the world, and damage

concerned international organizations to help take the necessary immediate measures in order to deal with their direct effects on human conditions in many parts of the world. These measures include, in particular, bringing under control the prices of basic food products, exploring the possibility to set preferential tariffs for the international transport of food cargoes, and offering countries suffering from food deficits immediate assistance in the form of seeds, fertilizers, fodder, and other farming materials. This will help them increase their own production, meet their urgent needs, and consolidate their capacities to form and preserve their food stocks.

We also call for providing financial support to countries importing food products, in order to alleviate their budget deficit resulting from the rise of prices, and for reducing taxes and customs duties on imported food products; thus removing obstacles to the continuous implementation of their development programs.

As the need to promote international cooperation and solidarity in such conditions is now growing more urgent than ever before, we renew our call to the international community to contribute to financing the World Solidarity Fund established by the United Nations, upon Tunisia's proposal, as a mechanism to curb poverty and need, by adopting the initiative we launched on April 28, 2008 for the allocation of one dollar for every barrel of oil to increase the resources of this Fund and use them to combat hunger in the world.

On the other hand, we wish to underline the need for States to accord farming, forestry and aquaculture the status they merit within their policies and development programs, given the importance of these sectors at the economic, social and

environmental levels. We take this opportunity to renew our call to financial backers and donor countries to help make up for the regression of investment in these sectors during the past years.

We hope the negotiations concerning the liberalization of the trade in agricultural products, within the framework of the World Trade Organization, will come out with adequate solutions that will make international trade more equitable, and offer developing countries and small farmers access to foreign markets.

Concerning the production of bioenergy, we would like to stress the need to address this issue very carefully, and recommend to carry out in-depth feasibility studies, and studies addressing the potential ecological, economic and social impact of this new activity. In all cases, absolute priority should be given to directing food production toward human consumption, and avoiding all forms of economic competition between the two activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The climate system is a common asset for all humanity. The UN Framework-Convention on Climate Change has established a comprehensive conception of the international effort to face the challenges posed by this change. We are convinced that scientific research remains the prime path to help adapt to this change, through intensifying research programs for the identification of drought- and salinity-resistant species, using biotechnology as part of multilateral cooperation, and establishing national plans and strategies to enlarge areas that can be sown and irrigated, and to increase agricultural production and improve its performance.

Tunisia has always set food security in the forefront of its national priorities. This interest has been consolidated through a

set of political and economic reforms we have established at the national level, based, in their methodology, on the complementarity between the economic and social dimensions, while granting the promotion of farming and farmers a special status within our country's development programs.

This has improved the general climate of the agricultural sector in our country and increased its productivity. Besides, a number of integrated agricultural projects and other specific projects have been implemented to promote rural areas, improve living conditions therein, develop small-scale farming, and enhance the role of rural women in the process of development.

The various programs and reforms adopted in Tunisia have been met with a positive response on the part of farmers and all who are involved in the agricultural sector. They have had a positive impact on the evolution currently witnessed in Tunisian agriculture, and on the development process in general. During the past couple of decades, in fact, the agricultural sector has contributed to promoting the economic growth, bringing down the poverty rate to 3.8%, against nearly 12% in the 1980s, achieving an unprecedented increase in self-sufficiency rates, and consolidating food security.

In the medium and long terms, our country has carried out a diagnostic study on climate change and its impact on the agricultural sector. It has also established a national strategy to promote the adaptation of the agricultural sector and ecosystems to this potential change, based on a methodology that combines prevention and the efficient treatment of its impacts, while integrating the element of climate change within the constants that should be taken into consideration when tracing the broad lines of the country's general economic and agricultural policy.

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Based on its constant values, Tunisia is continuously endeavoring to promote international cooperation and solidarity, and is sparing no effort to ensure the success of the Millennium programs, to achieve the set objectives, and to preserve the fundamental right to sufficient and healthy food for each individual all over the world, which will be one of the genuine UN achievements for the 21st century.

May God grant us all success for the benefit and well-being of our countries.

Thank you for your attention.