

UNITED KINGDOM

Douglas Alexander, Secretary of State for International Development

**Address to High Level Conference on World Food Security at
FAO, 3 June 2008**

President, distinguished colleagues,

Rising food prices are today threatening to reverse many of the gains that we have made on tackling hunger and poverty around the world.

The UK therefore welcomes this Conference and the initiative of the Secretary General, and the draft High Level Task Force report circulated today. This draft report provides a useful framework for a comprehensive and coordinated international response to this situation.

Donors, developing countries, international organisations, the private sector and civil society now need to work together to form an International Partnership for Agriculture and Food.

Such a partnership must galvanise action at national and international levels – and comprise an integrated programme of immediate, medium term and longer term actions if we are to ensure sustainable food security for all.

The most urgent need is to help those who are today being pushed into poverty by this crisis. In this regard I applaud the efforts of the World Food Programme, and the generous response to its appeal.

Putting purchasing power in the hands of poor people is a better solution than providing food aid, and we should quickly double the number of people taken out of long-term dependence on food aid through expanding social protection programmes.

Alongside this immediate response, we must all give greater priority to the underlying problems of poverty and hunger facing some 850 million people.

We must be ambitious in our long-term efforts. We should work tirelessly towards **a doubling of agricultural production in**

Africa, and a doubling of the rate of growth in the agriculture in South Asia.

In order to turn these aspirations into reality, governments in developing countries must lead. By setting sound policies - on land tenure and property rights, and making markets work effectively, they will position their rural economies for growth.

As donors, we must respond vigorously to this lead, and should stand ready to finance strong country-led agricultural plans. The Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme provides the framework for such a compact between country-led planning and donor response.

We must also make important reforms at the global level.

First, the world needs a fair global trading system that gives farmers in poor countries better access to the markets of the rich countries. It is unacceptable that rich countries still subsidise farming by \$1 billion dollars a day, costing poor farmers in developing countries an estimated \$100 billion dollars a year in lost income.

We are at a critical moment in the world trade organisation talks. Together, we must seize this moment, and reach a fair agreement in the weeks and months ahead.

Second, addressing the complex needs of food security also calls for more effective international institutions. We welcome, in particular, the independent evaluation of the FAO, and commend early efforts for reform. We need to use the current crisis as a catalyst for much deeper improvements. The world surely needs international institutions fit for purpose to deal with the challenges of the 21st century.

Third, long term food security will require a doubling of investment in international research. The CGIAR system has contributed greatly to agricultural growth over the past four decades, and we propose a doubling in its financing to \$1 billion per year. But it also needs to become less fragmented, and better integrated into regional, sub-regional and country level systems. We will push for rapid adoption of reform proposals currently under discussion.

AGRA is expected to play a dynamic role in putting technology in the hands of farmers. The UK is pleased to be the first bilateral donor to AGRA, and we commend it to you.

Fourth, the private sector must be recognized as the driver of agricultural growth. We must work hard to understand the causes of low investment, and seek to engage the private sector in events such as this. In this regard we propose an international meeting with the private sector to focus on agricultural and rural development.

Finally, we need to build consensus about emerging issues, such as the appropriate role for biofuels to ensure their use is environmentally and socially sustainable.

To achieve our goals we need a step change in the scale and impact of international effort to support the poor and the hungry.

The United Kingdom has pledged to play our part in such a step change.

That is why the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Gordon Brown, has said that food should be a central focus of both the G8 in July and the UN's Millennium Development Goals summit in September.

That is why, in April, the United Kingdom already pledged nearly \$110 million dollars to assist in the immediate response to rising food prices, and a further \$800 million dollars for agricultural research.

In addition to those pledges, I can announce today that the United Kingdom will provide a further \$66 million to provide humanitarian relief and social protection in Mozambique, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Sierra Leone – four of the countries most affected by rising food prices.

I can also announce today that we will spend a further \$76 million to help build roads in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to improve farmers' abilities to buy supplies and sell their crops; and a further \$15 million to strengthen crop resistance to climate change in Bangladesh.

These new announcements today will bring the United Kingdom's response to rising food prices to more than \$1 billion.

In addition, I can announce today that the United Kingdom will provide new commitments of budget support for Ghana, Uganda and Malawi - totalling \$434 million. This long-term, predictable funding will help the Governments of those countries to meet their own targets of increasing investment in agriculture and rural development.

Yet, as I have already suggested, to establish an effective response to this crisis, we must establish a global response.

So I commend to you an International Partnership for Agriculture and Food. Such an initiative could be invaluable in ensuring that our global efforts to tackle this crisis are not only ambitious - but co-ordinated, coherent, and greater than the sum of their parts.

I would urge you to consider such a partnership at this meeting, in order to ensure that no time is wasted in building an effective global response to this crisis. No less than the lives of millions depend on it.