

UNITED NATIONS NATIONS UNIES

THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
WORLD FOOD SECURITY:
THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIOENERGY
Rome, 3 June 2008

ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

**Mr. President, Giorgio Napolitano,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government
Mr. Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi,
Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the FAO,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
and Distinguished Delegates**

You all know about the severity and scale of the global food crisis. Before this emergency, more than 850 million people in the world were short of food. The World Bank estimates that this figure could rise by a further 100 million. The poorest of the poor spend two-thirds or more of their income on food. They will be hardest hit.

I have seen this for myself. In Liberia recently, I met people who normally would buy rice by the bag. Today, they buy it by the cup. In Cote d'Ivoire, the leaders of a country recovering from conflict and trying to build a democracy told me how they feared that food riots could undo all their hard work. We fear the same in other countries that, with UN help, have made gains in recent years: Afghanistan, Haiti and Liberia, to name but a few. And let us not forget the millions who suffer in silence and will go hungry unnoticed.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The threats are obvious to us all. Yet this crisis also presents us with an opportunity. It is a chance to revisit past policies. While we must respond immediately to high food prices, it is important that our longer term focus is on improving world food security - and remains so for some years

That is why I am so pleased that we are here. I thank Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the FAO, for his leadership. The world needs to produce more food. Food production needs to rise by 50% by the year 2030 to meet the rising demand. We have an historic opportunity to revitalize agriculture - especially in countries where productivity gains have been low in recent years.

Governments have already begun to respond. Some countries are helping farmers pay for basic agricultural “inputs,” such as seeds and fertilizers, the price of which has been so significantly affected by the rise in oil prices. We urgently need to find ways to support these initiatives, politically and financially.

That is why last month I set up a High-Level Task Force to come up with a Comprehensive Framework for Action. I want us to have a shared understanding of both the problems and solutions, and to move forward together, with urgency.

I would like to share some of the Task Force's recommendations with you.

First, we must improve vulnerable people's access to food and take immediate steps to increase food availability in their communities.

This includes:

- expanding food assistance through food aid, vouchers or cash;
- scaling up nutritional support and improving safety nets and social protection programmes to help the most vulnerable;
- boosting smallholder farmer food production through an urgent injection of key inputs (including seeds and fertilizers) in time for this year's planting seasons;
- improving rural infrastructure and links to markets, and expanding micro-credit programmes;
- adjusting trade and taxation policies to minimize export restrictions and import tariffs, and helping the free flow of agricultural goods;
- skillfully managing the impact of rising food prices on inflation and macro-economic policy;
- supporting balance of payments of net food importing countries where necessary; and
- helping to ensure that short term measures to respond to food price rises are financially sustainable for governments.

To guide us, we must improve food security and nutritional assessment systems, to ensure that we receive early warnings of hardship and are ready to respond.

Some countries have taken action by limiting exports or by imposing price controls. As I have said before, I say again now: Beggar Thy Neighbor food policies cannot work. They only distort markets and force prices even higher. I call on nations to resist such measures, and to immediately release exports designated for humanitarian purposes.

Second, we must act for longer term resilience and contribute to global food security.

This means:

- addressing structural issues that impede agricultural development;
- ensuring long term investment in smallholder farming in developing countries, including technical and financial support;
- helping governments to reinforce social safety nets for the neediest and most vulnerable people;
- looking at rural infrastructure needs, as well as new financing mechanisms;
- eliminating trade and taxation policies that distort markets - not least through rapid resolution of the Doha round; and
- supporting promising research into optimal food crops and better animal production systems, and adapting known technologies to existing food chains.

And we should also reach a greater degree of international consensus on bio-fuels.

These are parallel tracks—immediate needs must not be met at the expense of long-term solutions.

The international system is already contributing to immediate needs.

The FAO has called for \$1.7 billion in new funding to provide low-income countries with seeds and other agricultural support and has initiated a programme to counter soaring food prices.

The World Food Program has raised the additional \$755 million it needs to meet existing commitments this year. We owe a great debt of thanks to 31 generous donor-nations, most notably the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It will, of course, need significant extra resources to respond to new needs arising from the impact of the food crisis.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development is giving an additional \$200 million to poor farmers in the most affected countries and will want to do more as further resources become available.

The World Bank has established a new \$1.2 billion rapid financing facility to address immediate needs and boost food production, including \$200 million in grants targeted at the world's poorest nations.

I have set aside a reserve of \$100 million from the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund to help fund new humanitarian needs arising from soaring food prices.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs and various civil society groups have mobilized as well. They are sponsoring new feeding programs to combat hunger and malnutrition, paying for medicine and sending children to school. Private sector groups are engaged too.

We will work together to scale up these efforts and to ensure that national authorities are able to coordinate their implementation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by noting that the world's population will reach 7.2 billion by 2015. Today's problems will only grow larger tomorrow unless we act now.

I call on you to take bold and urgent steps to address the root causes of this global food crisis. We want a firm commitment to moving ahead.

This will not be easy. It may require big increases in financial support—often in the form of grants and material assistance, not lending. The UN Africa MDG Steering Group has estimated the requirements to realize a Green Revolution in Africa at some \$8 to 10 billion annually, just to boost productivity. This suggests that the overall global price tag for national governments and international donors could exceed \$ 15 to 20 billion annually, over a number of years.

Whatever the final figures, this will require enormous political will.

We will build on what we achieve here in Rome, at the G-8 Summit in July and the UN General Assembly in September. To the extent that climate change figures in this emergency, we must take it into account at our upcoming negotiations in Poznan and Copenhagen for a comprehensive agreement on global warming.

We must therefore leave this conference with a sense of purpose and mission, knowing that we are allied in our determination to make a difference. Only by acting together, in partnership, can we overcome this crisis, today and for tomorrow. Hundreds of millions of the world's people expect no less.

Nothing is more degrading than hunger, especially when man-made. It breeds anger, social disintegration, ill-health and economic decline.

In the name of the development goals we all set at the Millennium, the right to food and our common humanity, I urge you to act together now.

Thank you.