



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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ECOSOC Special Meeting on the Global Food Crisis 20 May 2008



Statement by HE the Hon Robert Hill Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

(Check against delivery)

Mr President

The Australian Government is deeply concerned about the impact of rising food and fuel prices on the world's most vulnerable people. Thank you for calling this timely meeting to discuss how the international community can work together to address the emerging challenges.

Mr President

Australia recognises that high commodity prices can be a key driver of growth and poverty reduction in net exporting countries, but also lead to higher costs for consumers and net food importing countries. The challenge is to address the negative impacts of high prices without further distorting world agricultural markets. We need to respond to higher world food prices with practical measures which provide relief to those most affected, while taking medium and longer term steps to increase investment and productivity in the agricultural sectors of developing countries.

History has proven that short-term, inward looking policies are not the answer. Policies that have been designed to shield countries from the rest of the world through tariffs, subsidies and self sufficiency targets have stifled the productivity of agricultural industries and reduced the incentives for investment in agriculture.

Mr President

The Australian Government will make a strong contribution to global efforts to improve food security.

We will provide A\$30 million in emergency assistance to the World Food Programme in response to their extraordinary appeal, in addition to more than A\$60 million in other support for WFP's operations this financial year.

Since the end of 2005, all of our support for WFP has been untied and provided to WFP in cash, for procuring commodities from the most cost-effective source anywhere in the world. We urge other member states to consider steps they may be able to take to progress the untying of food aid.

Australia will also act to tackle the root causes of food insecurity, through increased development assistance to improve agricultural productivity, strengthen markets, and promote sustainability in developing countries. Our development assistance in this area will draw on Australia's expertise in agriculture, including semi-arid agriculture and adaptation.

Mr President

While emergency assistance and a concerted international effort to lift agricultural productivity are both vital, the dismantling of barriers to trade in agricultural products must also be a part of the international response. Reducing tariff and subsidy barriers will provide increased opportunities for developing countries to expand agricultural production and exports. The Australian Government continues to strongly advocate for trade liberalisation in multilateral trade policy fora and in bilateral and regional trade policy dialogue.

Mr President

Australia welcomes the Secretary General's initiative to establish the UN Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, and we stand ready to assist the Task Force in its crucial work.

We do not underestimate the challenges presented by rising food prices. Nevertheless, we see opportunities in the current context to make progress in addressing distortions in the world agricultural market, with major benefits for developing countries and for the rural poor.

We look forward to working in partnership with other member states and international agencies in this endeavour.