



PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

828 SECOND AVENUE • NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017 • TEL. (212) 953-9130 • FAX (212) 697-1970

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## STATEMENT

BY

MR. BATURE LAWAL  
MINISTER  
PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

AT THE

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC  
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

ON

GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

NEW YORK, 20<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2008

**Mr. President,**

Let me start by joining other speakers in commending your laudable initiative in convening this very important Special Meeting of the Economic and Social Council on Global Food Crisis. It provides the international community with the opportunity to map out a coordinated and comprehensive response to address the problem. My delegation associates itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. President,

The world is at a crossroads and urgent action is needed to tackle the raging food crisis threatening millions of people. Recent reports indicate that the global food crisis was mainly caused by the unprecedented increases in the price of food and the diminishing food stocks as a result of climate change, the use of foodstuff for biofuels, financial speculation into the commodities market, and the high cost of fertilisers, among others. The enormity of the crisis is best illustrated with the rising prices of three staple foodstuff, namely wheat, maize and rice. It was reported that as of March 2008, wheat and maize prices had skyrocketed by 130 and 30% higher than a year ago. Similarly, rice prices were said to have more than doubled since late January this year. Unfortunately, the food crisis had already ignited riots and violent protests in a number of countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Another undesirable consequences of the Food Crisis is the negative effect it would have in the achievement of MDGs by 2015, as the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) had estimated that 'high food prices risk pushing over 100 million people back below the \$1 a day poverty line'.

In tackling the food crisis, the need for coordinated global leadership can not be over emphasized and in this respect we appreciate the efforts of the Secretary-General in not only mobilizing and sensitizing the international community on the threat to food security, but also for taking proactive action through the formation of the Task Force on Food Security, under his Chairmanship, as well as the concrete actions taken by the Chief Executive Board (CEB) in Berne, Switzerland, on 29 April 2008, which he also chaired. We are encouraged by the positive measures outlined at the end of the CEB meeting to tackle the Food Crisis and believe that if the measures were fully implemented, the desired result would be achieved.

In this respect we applaud the call by the CEB for the international community 'to urgently and fully fund the emergency requirements of US \$755 millions for the World Food Programme'. We also hope that the FAO, IFAD and the World Bank would fully and in a timely manner implement the commitments they made during the CEB meeting, as this will go along way in addressing the global food crisis. We hope the Task Force on the Global Food Crisis will serve as the mechanism to coordinate and implement all the international commitments made to address the Global Food Crisis.

Mr. President,

Although the food crisis is global, African countries are among the worst affected. As agriculture holds the key to sustainable food security, the present global food crisis should be regarded as an opportunity to accord priority to agriculture, particularly in Africa, where the effects of the food crisis are most acute. In as much as we recognise the fact that Africa has vast natural resources with the potentials not only to feed itself but also to be a net exporter of food, it must also be acknowledged that Africa faces daunting challenges, which arguably no other continent has faced in its drive to transform its potentials in to economic prosperity. These include the prevalence of endemic diseases like malaria, which is peculiar to Africa, and the adverse effect of climate change.

Indeed the recent report of the Secretary-General on Africa indicates that the continent is expected to suffer from a drop in agricultural productivity, leading to deteriorating food security conditions and increased risk of hunger, with agricultural decline attributable to climate change being in the range of 17 to 28 per cent by 2080! This ominous projection has underscored the urgent need for the international community to take proactive action to assist Africa avert the coming calamity!

In this context we welcome the interest of the international community for a Green Revolution in Africa and would encourage international efforts in this respect to be mainstreamed into the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which was prepared by NEPAD to address issues of growth in the agricultural sector, rural development and food security. Africa is also keenly following the salutary efforts of the UN Africa MDG Steering Group, chaired by the Secretary-General and is optimistic that the Group is capable of mobilising the US\$8 to 10 billion, it estimated would be required annually to realise the African Green Revolution. It is also encouraging to hear the timely shift from traditional food aid to food assistance by some donors and operational international agencies, such as the World Food Programme.

Other formidable challenges stunting Africa's drive towards food security include: fragile natural resource base due to the ravaging effects of drought and desertification, the lack of accurate and updated climate and weather information, low soil fertility, insufficient rural finance, limited access to credit by farmers, poor rural infrastructure, insufficient fund and budgetary allocation, high cost of farm inputs, lack of access to market, lack of requisite modern technologies at affordable cost, an unfair international trading system resulting in the sharp fall of the continent share of world exports from 2.8 % to 1.4% between 1980 and 2005, furthermore, Africa's share of global FDI in 2006 was less than 3%, mostly in commodity-extracting industries rather than in manufacturing. We are nonetheless convinced that the

international community has the wherewithal to assist Africa not only to surmount the challenges and feed itself but as well to produce surplus to export to other countries.

Mr. President,

In the case of Nigeria, the current global food crisis did not come to us a surprise in view of the fact that the government spent a total of \$2.9 billion in 2007 to import various food items. The government is, therefore, mapping out a comprehensive strategy to reverse this trend, with the firm conviction that the best way to guarantee food security in the country is by revitalising agriculture. It has as such set aside N200 billion (\$1.7billion) for the next four years (2008-2011), for the development of a National Food Security Programme to boost domestic production of food crops and the development of agro-allied industries.

The government has also outlined medium and long-term solutions to address the problem. These include; the release of over 11,000 metric tonnes of assorted grains from the strategic reserves to the public, plan to double the national Strategic Food Reserves from the present 300,000 metric tonnes to 600'000 metric tonnes, the importation of 500,000 metric tonnes of rice, provision of N10billion (\$800 million) credit facility for the purchase of equipment for rice farmers, increasing production capacity, enhancing storage facilities and procuring 10,000 tractors per year, allocation of 1.65% of the budget as a special intervention in the agricultural sector, the suspension of import duties on rice for six month, immediate establishment of rice processing clusters in all the rice-producing areas of the country to prepare and package the rice in accordance with international standards, the provision of lands for large scale farming and the establishment of agric processing centres and agric parks.

Mr. President,

Apart from the constraints earlier highlighted, another major serious threat to food security, especially in West Africa, is the phenomenal drying-up of Lake Chad and the shrinking of the River Niger, largely due to climate change and rapidly growing population. Lake Chad has shrunk by 95% from 25,000 square kilometres in the mid 1960s to 1,350 square kilometres in 2001! In short, the Lake is now about one-twentieth the size it was in the mid 1960s. The lake is the fourth largest in Africa, with about 30 million people from Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad relying on the Lake for their sustenance. In the concerted efforts to save the Lake, Nigeria, Niger and Chad have embarked on a water diversion project to pump water from the Obangui River in Congo to Lake Chad. The project is expected to cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

Similarly, the River Niger, which is the third largest river in Africa, has shrunk by one third in the last thirty years. In fact there are fears that if urgent action is not taken, the river may slowly disappear. This would be catastrophic, as more than 110 million people, most of them poor, eke their livelihoods in the river's basin area. This has informed the adoption by the nine member States of the Niger Basin Authority of a 20-year plan costing \$8.6 billion, to rescue the River. As this is a major serious threat to food security, affecting over a hundred millions of people in many countries of the sub-region, Nigeria has consistently been drawing the attention of the international community and the donors to intensify their assistance in the efforts to rescue Lake Chad and the River Niger.

Mr. President,

Another serious threat to food security in Nigeria is the high cost of fertilizer with spiraling effect on food prices. Nigeria is a major producer of gas, which is a major content of fertilizer. Nigeria will therefore welcome the infusion of foreign investment in this area.

Mr. President,

It is evident in the CEB Berne Meeting, the Secretary-General's Background Information and the ECOSOC's Issues Note on the Global Food Crisis (prepared for this meeting), that the world is not in want of solutions. What is critical and crucial now is the urgent and committed implementation of such solutions and mobilisation of additional funds.

I thank you.