



SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Statement by H.E. Camillo M. Gonsalves,

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At the Special Meeting on the Global Food Crisis

Economic and Social Council, United Nations, NY

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Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

We are all acutely aware of the scope of the problem we now face, and its enormous humanitarian consequences. In the three hours scheduled for this meeting, over 2,000 children will die of hunger. Nonetheless, however tragic and calamitous, the predicament that we discuss today is merely a symptom of deeper structural flaws in our global economic system and consumerist culture. It is the canary in the mineshaft of trade barriers, biofuels, climate change, and anemic development assistance. Without adjustments to these underlying malaises, the symptom that we are discussing today will reoccur with increasing frequency and severity.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is acutely aware that, within our own CARICOM region, the scarcity and escalating prices of basic foodstuff has already led to riots and political instability. We have attempted to assist, in our own small way, our more immediately affected sister CARICOM States, and will continue to do so. But to our region, the high prices and scarcities are imported problems, largely beyond our direct control, and byproducts of a system that for too long has taken the existence of a limitless food supply for granted.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is attempting to mitigate the escalating cost of imported food by increasing local production. Our multifaceted National Food Production Plan includes the provision of free fertilizer to the producers of staples; the production and distribution of heavily subsidized seedlings; the scientific screening of different crop varieties; the aggressive use of tissue cultures; financial assistance for agricultural diversification; increased farmer education; state assistance in livestock production; and strengthening the legislative framework to protect farmers' agricultural products and livestock.

Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

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As a small island state, fisheries constitute a critical component of our national food supply, and we are hoping to build on the 56% rise in fish landings so far this year.

However, these local measures are only marginally ameliorative, and cannot totally insulate St. Vincent and the Grenadines from the price increases and shortages. We are again buffeted by the winds of unequal trade liberalization, in which the agricultural subsidies of developed states force our own small agro-industries to an uncompetitive demise. We are witness to a world where crops are grown to feed cars, while people starve, and where climate change ruins age-old farming and fishing livelihoods.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines echoes the call of the current and previous UN Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food for a temporary halt on the production and investment in biofuels. Until second generation biofuels can coexist, rather than compete, with food production, they are an irresponsible investment in starvation. We also endorse the comments of the UN Secretary-General at the recently concluded twelfth UN Conference on Trade and Development, where he called agricultural subsidies “relics” that should be scrapped in this era of high prices. We applaud the announcement of a \$100m food fund by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and the \$100m in food aid announced by Japan. It is our sincere hope that other developed states consider similar initiatives. States that produce petroleum – from which many fertilizers and pesticides are made – also have a special role to play in mitigating the current emergency. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines also congratulates the Secretary-General on his announcement of a high-powered task force to address this emergency, and stresses the crucial importance of fisheries in any analysis of food supply.

Further, St. Vincent and the Grenadines once again reminds States of the importance of meeting commitments regarding Official Development Assistance, and the necessity for immediate cooperation with developing States to produce higher yields and better crops.

Finally, the issue of Climate Change is once again brought sharply into focus. There is a minority of people on this planet who waste more than the rest of the world uses. We are consuming many times more than our fair share, and irreparably damaging the planet’s health and productive capacity in the process. Again, as in every example of climate change, it is not the polluter who is bearing the brunt of changing weather patterns and the resultant agricultural scarcity. It is the poor who starve while we drive SUVs to restaurants for multi-course meals. Polluters cannot escape their moral obligation to address what they have wrought.

Mr. President,

Without structural changes to our economic system, our production structures, and our consumerist culture, we will one-day look back at this hunger crisis as a comparatively mild symptom, and as a wake-up call tragically ignored. Let us resolve to attack the root causes of this issue, and resist the urge to apply superficial quick-fixes to this structural malaise.

I thank you.