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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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**STATEMENT  
BY  
SOUTH AFRICA  
  
TO THE  
  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING ON THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS  
  
UNITED NATIONS  
NEW YORK  
21 MAY 2008**

**Check against delivery**

Mr President,

South Africa welcomes the debate on the Global Food Crisis within ECOSOC as part of its efforts to engage stakeholders on emerging global trends to raise awareness and to ensure a stronger commitment from all stakeholders in addressing these challenges.

During the World Food Summit in 1996, Heads of State and Governments reaffirmed “the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger.” These laudable efforts were further given impetus by the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000.

During 2007 the theme “The choice of The Right to Food” was selected for World Food Day, demonstrating the increasing recognition by the international community of the important role of human rights in eradicating hunger and poverty, and hastening and deepening sustainable development. Despite these important developments and recognitions of the need to address poverty and hunger, we are still faced with a global food crisis.

Much has been said during the past few weeks regarding the reasons as to why we face a global food crisis. Issues such as the higher demand for grain to feed livestock in Asia, market jitters brought on by several countries no longer exporting grains, speculators seeing a chance to make money, the extra demand for food crops to be used in bio fuels, a growing appetite for meat and dairy products among Asia’s burgeoning middle class, the lack of investment in agriculture over the past years, trade distorting subsidies, higher energy costs and recurrent bad weather were some of the reasons given for the crisis. And we have to accept, collectively, that many of these reasons could perhaps have been addressed differently, possibly leading to different results.

Mr President,

South Africa is pleased to note that many commentators already agree that the global food crisis demands a global response be found to collectively address these challenges, particularly to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are being met and that we do not falter our aim to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We also welcome the High-level Task Force established by the UN Secretary-General to address the food crisis and we look forward to its proposals.

It is also heartening to see that many countries have already indicated that they will be contributing additional funding to the appeals made by UN Agencies like the World Food Programme, to address the challenge that the increased food prices has on the budgets of these agencies. The request for additional funding should be supported; not only to the WFP, but also to support other UN agencies like the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), to assist developing countries in addressing the challenges of agricultural development, food nutrition and ensuring food security. We must ensure the effective functioning of these UN institutions to allow them to alleviate the plight of many of the vulnerable, particularly in the developing countries. Too often many programmes of support had to be “re-prioritised” due to insufficient funding. It is also necessary to appeal to these UN institutions to ensure that they are willing and prepared to effectively implement their mandates, when addressing this particular crisis.

Without a firm determination to act, we will again fail in solving the crisis. We will continue to have an increase in the amount of poor people going to bed hungry, even forcing some of them to stop sending their children to school to receive the education they so rightly need or to stop spending money on health and medical expenditures, in order to survive.

Mr President,

It is well known that high food prices are posing serious challenges to many African countries, creating a new type-of emergency which threatens the stability and security of these countries. The high prices of

food commodities and its adverse effects do not only affect the most vulnerable, but also those living on the thin edge of the poverty line, again a serious challenge to the African continent.

Africa has, however, already recognised the importance of having a plan to deal with the challenges of food security and the development of an agricultural policy that could reduce poverty and hunger. The African Union adopted at Heads of State level the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) in 2003 as a framework for the restoration of agriculture growth, food security and rural development in Africa, with the primary focus of agricultural development that eliminates hunger, reduces poverty and food insecurity, opening the way for export expansion. CAADP is also a primary programme of NEPAD, aiming to contribute to sustained economic growth and development through capacity building and infrastructure development, specifically in the agricultural sector. The financial and political commitment by national governments, which, in conjunction with the principles of accountability and mutual review, collectively has certainly raised the credibility of the agenda of CAADP.

It is also pleasing to note that during a meeting in Lisbon 2007, the EU and Africa agreed to, in the area of agriculture, to promote, inter alia, policy coherence for development, food security, food safety and food quality; to increase domestic and foreign investment; to strengthen agricultural research for development and make the best use of the opportunities opened up by advances in bio-technology. The EU-AU partnership on agricultural development will therefore support Africa's agricultural agenda, as set out in the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) and will highlight the principle of cooperation through partnerships.

However, Africa faces a challenge to attract sufficient international funding to ensure the successful implementation and execution of this programme. International assistance could contribute to allow Africa to progress on its own green revolution, ensuring the reduction of poverty, stability and the promotion of sustainable development and progress. Support to CAADP and other regional initiatives would contribute to the appeal made by many to increase spending, donor funding for agriculture and food security as a medium to long term measure to address the current food crisis.

South Africa like others, therefore agrees that we would need to act to ensure a global response in the short, medium and long term, as the food crisis will not be addressed by simplistic actions. We know that technology could play a role by means of better crop varieties, pesticides and fertilisers which could assist in producing more. Agriculture can also no longer be thought of simply as production. We need to include social, economic and environmental issues, and think about the gender and cultural impacts. Greater and more effective involvement of women and use of their knowledge, skills and experience will certainly advance progress towards sustainability and development goals. The distribution of know-how and technology expertise to the average farmer in the developing world could also assist in increasing production, assisting in addressing the current food crisis that we are facing.

We would therefore appeal to the international community, the private sector and non-governmental organisations to contribute together, in a spirit of partnership, in finding solutions. Public-private partnerships in particular could be helpful to assist farmers in obtaining funding to invest in agricultural activities. We would like to call on financial institutions to increase funding, taking a positive decision to be willing to make an investment in a productive segment that will ensure our future.

Mr President,

South Africa has not been spared the challenges imposed by the Global Food Crisis. As a Government we have already established an Integrated Food Security Strategy during 2002 with the purpose to promote universal physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food by all South Africans to meet their dietary and food preferences for an active and healthy life. In terms of Chapter 2, section 27.1b of the Constitution of South Africa (1996), Government guarantees progressive social rights; that every citizen has the right to have access to sufficient food and water and that the State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve realization of this right. The Government, through the Department of Health is also spearheading the mandatory fortification of staple foods. South African bread and maize meal is fortified with six vitamins and two minerals to

improve the quality of diets consumed by South Africans. Similarly the Department of Education is involved in the promotion of school gardens and provision of meals through its National Feeding Programme, providing food and nutrition to poor communities. However, more needs to be done and the South African Cabinet has established an Inter Ministerial Committee (IMC) food prices task team to further evaluate the challenges and to make recommendations to ensure that the needs and challenges faced by the most vulnerable communities in South Africa, are getting the attention it deserves. The interventions under consideration include broadening and strengthening the coverage of social 'safety net' measures, enhancing the implementation of an Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Programme, and fast-tracking of the implementation of the land and agrarian reform programme to promote agricultural production and investment.

South Africa will also continue to participate in international discussions of this nature, including in the forthcoming High-level Meeting in Rome on "World Food Security and the Challenges of Climate Change and Bio-energy", which could contribute to a better understanding of the challenges the global community face, in order to find the possible solutions and to create partnerships that could address these challenges.

Mr President,

South Africa's participation in this discussion is based on the principle that a global crisis demands a global response within the ambit of partnerships. We also agree with others that we should see this crisis as a new opportunity to reverse the distorted trade, aid and investment policies that have slowed agricultural growth in the developing world and to start investing in the lives of millions of poor farmers, ensuring an agricultural renaissance and refresh the way we look at food security and agricultural development. Through the sharing of our experiences and best practises, transfer of know-how and research, commitment to financially support global, regional and national efforts to address programmes of action that would tackle the issue of sustainable agricultural development and food security, we could contribute to efforts to ensure the reduction of poverty and the elimination of hunger. We owe it to ourselves that we don't squander this opportunity.

I thank you.