

## **Special Event on “Food Crises in Africa” ECOSOC Chamber Thursday, 27 October 2005<sup>1</sup>**

### **PRESIDENT’S SUMMARY**

#### **I. BACKGROUND**

The Special Event of the Economic and Social Council on Food Crises in Africa, held on Thursday, 27 October 2005, was the first in a series launched by the Council in response to the new responsibilities entrusted to it by the 2005 World Summit to “develop its ability to respond better and more rapidly to developments in the international economic, environmental and social fields” and to “support and complement international efforts aimed at addressing humanitarian emergencies.”

The Special Event, chaired and opened by the President of ECOSOC, Ambassador Munir Akram of Pakistan, was well-attended by delegations, representatives of the organizations of the United Nations family, and civil society. It began with an opening statement by the President of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Jan Eliasson. This was followed by a panel discussion with the participation of H.E. Mr. Simeon A. Adekanye, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations; Mr. James T. Morris, Executive Director, United Nations World Food Programme (WFP); Mr. Lennart Båge, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); Mr. Henri Carsalade, Assistant Director-General, Technical Cooperation Department, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); Mr. Mark Bowden, Chief of Policy Development Branch, Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); Ms. Julie Howard, Executive Director, Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa. Presentations by panelists were followed by an interactive dialogue with representation of Members States.

#### **II. OVERVIEW**

The central message of the meeting was that the international community was not giving adequate attention to persistent food crises in Africa. This was despite the fact that since 1998 there had been approximately 20 food emergency cases every year in Africa and that currently 24 countries faced significant food shortages, affecting close to 35 million people. One illustration of less than sustained global attention on food crisis in Africa was the poor response of the international community to flash appeals, as well as lack of tangible, consistent and sustainable effort to address the root causes of the crises.

Secondly, a lethal mix of recurring drought, the impact of AIDS, weakened capacity for governance, and conflict contributed to the cycle of recurrent food crises. Conflict and its legacy were identified as being a significant factor in the cycle of food crises facing a number of countries in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> For details of the Special Event, including Issues Note and statements see [http://www.un.org/docs/ecosoc/meetings/2005/special\\_event.html](http://www.un.org/docs/ecosoc/meetings/2005/special_event.html)

Another important theme covered in the meeting touched on the impact of malnutrition and hunger on the prospects of achieving the MDGs. While acknowledging the severity and impact of HIV/AIDS, a number of participants noted that hunger claims more lives globally each year than HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.

In proposing solutions to address the recurrent cycle of food crises, participants largely accepted the principle of twin-track approach of immediate relief assistance and social safety nets combined with increased investment in agricultural and rural development over the long-term. In this connection, access for the poor to land and water, technology, financial services and markets and giving voice to poor farmers were highlighted as crucial for unleashing the potential of Africa's smallholder farm sector. Enabling policies for private sector initiatives, and dynamic research and extension services were also considered as essential to accelerating the agricultural and rural development.

A number of participants expressed their optimism at the possibility of Africa coming out of this vicious cycle because of the commitment of Heads of State and Government of the African Union to increase budgetary allocations to agriculture and rural development to at least 10 percent of total national public expenditures by 2008 - Commitments made in the context of NEPAD and initiatives taken to implement its Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP).

Participants also underscored the need for stronger support for Africa from development partners, especially in addressing technical issues such as the lack of irrigation, pests, post-harvest losses, and poor infrastructure. A number of participants expressed the view that a supportive environment for national policies could be created at the international level if actions were taken to secure improved terms of trade for the continent's agricultural products in the context of the Doha Round of trade negotiations.

### III. STATEMENTS

**Chair H.E. Mr. Munir Akram (Pakistan), President of the ECOSOC** presented an overview of the scale and gravity of the tragedy faced by Africa in the context of food crises, which he termed as "desperate and degrading aspect of poverty", that represented the most serious humanitarian crisis in Africa today. Chronic food insecurity and the increasing number of emergency food crises remained a critical challenge to survival and to the realization of long-term development goals. The President pointed to the "tragic paradox" that "despite all our resources and technological wonders, we were still facing recurrent famines in Africa. Noting that the situation was complex, interwoven and, in many cases, embedded in history, he underscored the necessity to confront this tragedy, which was an affront to our compassion, ethics and dignity.

**H. E. Mr. Jan Eliasson (Sweden), President of the 60th Session of the GA** stated that the international community was still not good enough in providing emergency assistance when needed. He noted that merely an average of 16% of funds for "flash appeals" were provided during the vital first month of a crisis. He underscored the importance of African leadership in moving countries away from dependence on food aid and welcomed the increasing momentum behind the NEPAD Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) this year. President Eliasson noted three areas where the World Summit asked for more,

namely a better-performing UN country presence, improved mechanisms for the use of emergency standby capacities and strengthening of the UN humanitarian response, including through strengthening the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF). In this connection, President Eliasson noted that an expanded CERF will make practical difference in the lives of millions of people.

**H. E. Mr. Simeon A. Adekanye, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations on behalf of the African Union** pointed out that the causes of the chronic food crises in Africa are on the surface straightforward, including recurring droughts, debilitating diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, conflicts, and weak investments in agriculture, which were contributing to the current food crises as a dangerous mix. Furthermore, quoting from the Millennium Project, Ambassador recalled that a lethal combination of the five structural problems, i.e. the adverse geopolitics, remoteness, low productivity, high transport costs and susceptibility to disease, have rendered the whole continent of Africa as the most vulnerable region in the world.

Ambassador Adekanye stressed that whatever the underlying factors of the African food crises might be, the continent was in dire need of food to meet immediate and long-term challenges. In this context, he called for a use of a twin-track approach to meet immediate needs, through emergency measures that would include generous external assistance and long-term strategies to significantly increase and improve productivity in Africa. In this connection, he called for the immediate implementation of the projects and priorities of the CAADP, which in his view would help to usher in the much-needed Green Revolution in Africa. In addition, he called for concrete action to address the challenges of health, education, capacity building, the strengthening of institutions and market access for agricultural products. Ambassador also pointed out the lack of success of the Consolidated Appeals Process and stressed the need for fulfilling the pledges of support in a timely and coordinated manner.

**Mr. James T. Morris, Executive Director of the WFP** said that as many as 2.1 million young children had died this year of hunger and related diseases in Africa and one third of the African population live under the shadow of hunger. However few realized that hunger claimed more lives than HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined but only 8 of the 70 Heads of State who met at the 2005 World Summit mentioned hunger as a serious challenge. Mr. Morris noted that cutting hunger in half is one of the Millennium Development Goals where international community was losing ground. He pointed to the fact that in 2002, WHO confirmed that malnutrition was the single greatest threat worldwide. While highlighting the link between hunger and conflict, he observed that more than 9 out of 10 deaths from hunger and malnutrition occurred among the chronically hungry, not in a conflict zone.

Mr. Morris also stressed the negative impact of HIV/AIDS on hunger and food security as a whole, noting that it had claimed nearly 8 million African farmers, more than in North America and the EU combined. In this context, he expressed the hope that media interest could be generated for the suffering in Southern Africa where the earlier estimate of 3.5 million people needing food has almost tripled to more than 10 million. He noted the lack of success in funding UN Consolidated Appeals and called for more ODA to Africa.

**Mr. Lennart Båge, President of the IFAD** called for efforts to help Africa become famine-proof, while noting that long-term food insecurity in Niger had turned into famine as a result of events such as drought, the locust attacks of 2004 and the impact of regional trade policies. To achieve this, he supported the twin-track approach of immediate response to emergency needs combined with substantially greater investment in agriculture and rural development to build longer term food security and eradicate rural poverty. In addition to more ODA, Mr. Båge urged the successful conclusion of the Doha Round of trade negotiations which would provide improved a market access for agricultural exports of African countries. Policies geared towards increasing access to land, water, technology, financial services and markets as well as voice for the poor farmers were also considered as indispensable to creating the conditions for agricultural and rural development. Mr. Båge also sketched the outline of a possible Sahel Agricultural Development Initiative, which would aim to enhance food production capacity, set up locally managed food security stocks, generate income producing activities, improve access to markets, clean water and sanitation and health centers targeting 30 percent of the Sahelian population at risk. He called for its implementation and replication elsewhere and urged potential collaborators to join a common effort.

**Mr. Henri Carsalade, Assistant Director-General of Technical Cooperation Department of the FAO** said that food crises making the headlines in the newspapers are but the tip of the iceberg and constitute only the visible part of deep-seated economic crisis that has evolved in the region over time. In addition to those needing emergency assistance, one-third of the population of Africa is suffering from chronic hunger – the forgotten emergency - which make them vulnerable to diseases and contribute to their poverty. Supporting the twin-track approach of emergency aid and longer-term attention to agricultural and rural development, Mr. Carsalade also stressed the importance of safety nets for the most vulnerable populations with programmes of investment and support for production activities to all the poorest populations to move out of food insecurity. Urging more support for food production, he called attention to a number of successes in Africa, including the development of cassava, tea, horticultural and milk production in Kenya and the achievements of Guinea and Mali in rice. Africa's own efforts through the CAADP as well as the food security programmes of the regional organizations and FAO's own Special Programme are beginning to have an impact but more needs to be done.

**Mr. Mark Bowden, Chief of Policy Development Branch of the OCHA** pointed out that food crises in Africa are not simply humanitarian emergencies that can be solved by traditional humanitarian responses or quick-impact aid. However, he stressed the importance of addressing quickly the prevention of social and economic losses that cut the affected populations off from the networks and markets on which their livelihoods depend. Citing the legacy of conflict as central to the difficulties in rebuilding food systems, Mr. Bowden said that the conflicts had cost Africa more than \$120 billion worth of agricultural production during the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, in his view, there can be no end to food crises in Africa without minimizing the impact of conflict on civilians or protecting their lives and livelihoods. Also pointing to the impact of disasters, including successive cycles of floods, drought, erratic rains, locust infestation, Mr. Bowden stressed the importance of heeding early warning and maintaining well-established response mechanisms.

**Ms. Julie Howard, Executive Director of Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa** noted that there was a large gap between the policy-level embrace of agriculture-led

economic growth in Africa and the actual investments to make it happen. Pointing to the disparity in recent development assistance to the agricultural sector compared to health and education sectors, she called for increase in the share of agricultural-related assistance. Ms. Howard also pointed to the need for dramatic improvement in aid effectiveness, including the reduction of donor-imposed restrictions on how assistance should be spent, and for avoiding fragmentation of project portfolios. Referring to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of March 2005, Ms. Howard indicated her intention to work with other public and private sector partners to push for its rapid implementation. In concluding, Ms. Howard expressed concern regarding the priority accorded to the Millennium Village concept and the absence of high-level discussion about the relative merits of this model against the historical programme experiences of many UN development agencies. In her view, giving away free seeds, fertilizers, health care and education at the village level provides dramatic results in the short term but is unsustainable without the larger set of public investments and without engaging the private sector. Additionally, the approach also takes away attention from public investment in infrastructure, institution building, improving governance and capacity-building.

In response to Ms. Howard's comments on the Millennium Village concept, **Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Millennium Project**, has addressed a letter to the President of the Council, stressing the high level community involvement and participation in the Millennium Village. He has also indicated that there was no free distribution of inputs or health care interventions, as suggested by Ms. Howard, rather the farmers were obligated to turn a part of their increased harvest back to the community for use in the school feeding program and for others in need. In this context, he cited the initial success of the application of the concept in a village in Kenya. Professor Sachs also challenged the view that there is neglect of governance saying that "the Millennium Villages don't just talk about governance; they do something about it – by setting practical governance goals of community participation, scaling up public investments, and long-term planning and improvement of the business environment."

In the interactive debate, a number of representatives from the region, Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia spoke of their particular challenges in facing the food crises in their country.

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