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Statement of the President of ECOSOC at the Special Event of the “Food and Economic Crises in Post-Conflict Countries”

29 October 2009

Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to this joint Special event of the Economic and Social Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, in partnership with the World Food Programme. Since assuming my post as President of the Economic and Social Council, it has been my earnest endeavour to bring the work of the two bodies closer together, and H.E. Ambassador Munoz, Chair of the Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission, has done the same on his side. We share the view concerning the importance of mobilizing the whole institutional machinery of the United Nations to develop answers to the complex and difficult needs of post-conflict countries and prevent their relapse into conflict.

Our discussions today on the food and economic crises in post-conflict countries will focus on the most vulnerable countries and people. The correlation between acute poverty and hunger, on the one hand, and conflict, on the other hand, is well known - nine out of ten countries with the lowest human development indicators have experienced conflict at some point or other since 1990- , as is the need for broad international support to countries emerging from conflict, in order to ensure sustainable peace and stability. The situation in countries for which the Peacebuilding Commission has specific configurations illustrates this state of affairs. Two of them, Burundi and Guinea-Bissau, were for a long time on the agenda of ECOSOC through its *ad hoc* Advisory groups. The Council supported these countries and remains attentive to their needs. This meeting aims *inter alia* at highlighting the vulnerability of these countries and to warn that international efforts carried out since the beginning of the decade can be jeopardized by the current economic and financial crisis, if no commensurate support is provided.

Allow me to refer also briefly to the situation in Haiti, a country that I visited with the ECOSOC ad hoc Advisory Group last May. With over a third of the overall population being moderately or extremely food insecure, Haiti has recently gone through political turmoil linked to the steady rise in food prices, leading to hunger demonstrations in Spring 2008, the subsequent dismissal of the Government and a political crisis that lasted several months. Thanks to the peacekeeping troops of MINUSTAH, public order has been maintained and development agencies could provide immediate support. These events underlined however the challenges of enhancing food security and rural development in Haiti as a condition for long-term stability. During its visit in May, the ECOSOC Group witnessed the willingness of the Haitian Government to relaunch as a priority the national agricultural production, including fisheries. As the Group reported to the Council, the promotion of private sector investments, which has received much international attention recently in Haiti, should not overcome the need for sustained support to rural communities, which remain the backbone of the Haitian society. The work of the FAO, WFP, IFAD, UNDP and others, that we witnessed during our visit is of utmost importance and should be backed by sustained donor funding.

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Deprivation is not compatible with stability. The international community should join forces to elaborate social safety nets for countries in need, in general, and for post-conflict countries, in particular. A clear architecture of what is required from the various actors, governments of recipient countries, regional organizations, the United Nations system and donors, is a prerequisite. I trust that this meeting will provide some elements of answers that should be followed up at the level of the Council and in other fora, such as the United Nations General Assembly, the forthcoming Summit on Food Security to be held in Rome and the Conference on South-South Cooperation later this year in Nairobi.

For me, it is inconceivable that the gains we have made in the security field since the beginning of the decade would be allowed to vanish and that our international commitments to reach development goals in a clear time frame remain empty words. This is why it is with a certain sense of urgency that I invite you to take action on international support to countries emerging from conflict, making full use of international organizations and mechanisms. I trust that our common endeavours with the Peacebuilding Commission and the World Food Programme will inspire other initiatives in this field.

I thank you for your attention.