



**Draft statement by H.E. Mr. Lazarous Kapambwe
President of ECOSOC**

**Briefing on the global food prices
18 February 2011**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this special briefing on rising food prices. Much has changed since 2008 — year of the last global food crisis — and yet, much seems familiar.

In 2008, food riots erupted in some 30 countries. In 2011, rising prices, combined with rising unemployment, have also sparked riots and political unrest.

January saw the Food and Agriculture Organization's Food Price Index rise for a seventh consecutive month to an all-time high, well above its previous 2008 peak. And this past year, the world's poorest nations spent an estimated 11 percent more on food imports.

The FAO tells us that rising prices have been triggered by recent extreme weather events.

But bad weather is only partly to blame. Policies, such as subsidies to ethanol producers and export bans, have hurt too.

Strong global demand is another factor. Economic growth has produced a new demand for meat and animal feed.

Meanwhile, demand for other agricultural raw materials accelerates unabated, creating fresh competition for the land and other resources food crops need.

For all their similarities, 2011 is not 2008, at least not yet.

Distinguished delegates,

Between 1974 and 2005, food prices on world markets fell by three-quarters in real terms. Investment in farming and things which sustain it, such as irrigation, plunged, as did the share of public spending on agriculture in developing countries.

During this period, urban consumers benefited, while rural dwellers — including three-quarters of the world's poor — typically suffered as farming incomes slid. In the process, many poor countries which previously exported food became net importers.

In today's environment of rising food prices, therefore, there are winners as well as losers.

So what can ECOSOC do?

Sound the alarm before disaster strikes. The Council has done so in the past, holding two special sessions on food crises in 2005 in Africa and the global food crisis in 2008. The Council has also addressed the challenges of rural development in 2003 when it focused in part on food security and small-holder agriculture and again at its annual substantive session.

But we need to get from talk to action — in the short-run to alleviate suffering, in the long-run to make the world more resilient to price swings.

I am very pleased to have with us today four distinguished speakers from the UN system who will brief us on the rising food prices. They will help us distinguish between the transitory and structural factors driving rising prices and how we can balance consumption and production factors so that we all benefit.

They will tell us how to balance higher prices for agricultural products, which is good for farmers, with the needs of the hungry and unemployed.

They will tell us how to feed more people and do it in a way that does not exacerbate climate change.

They will also explain how they are supporting countries which face this challenge, including how they are jointly working together to maximize results.

For its part, ECOSOC, as always, stands on call to help — to offer expert guidance to Member States and ensure sustained follow-up over the long-term.

To avoid a repeat of recent food crises, vigilance is key. Today's meeting is a good start.

Thank you.