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**Agriculture**

**Statement**  
**on behalf of the European Union**  
**by**

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Madam Chairperson / Mr Chairman, distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Commission has the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

**To meet our Johannesburg commitments in the field of agriculture, we must address the following main challenges:**

▪ **Challenge 1: Foster rural development and refocus agricultural policy**

To meet JPoI obligations and achieve MDG 1, the objectives of poverty eradication, food security and sustainable natural resource management must be integrated into an agricultural and rural development framework. This becomes even more urgent in view of volatility in prices for food, feed and fertiliser, as well as the international debate on agriculture and food security, which has dominated the political agenda during most of last year. Clear recognition should be given to the need to ensure long-term food security, especially in developing countries, in a sustainable manner. The EU has already contributed significantly towards this end with the approval in December 2008 of the 1 billion euros (Food Facility), which will be implemented from 2009.

The recognition of the important role of women in agricultural production, especially in developing countries, needs to be reiterated.

▪ **Challenge 2: Improve access to existing markets and sustainably develop new markets for value-added agricultural products**

In order to fulfil this JPoI commitment, we must address the environmental and social impacts of agriculture/food products over their life cycle. Global food security cannot be adequately addressed, from a long-term perspective, without sustainable agriculture, adequate land, soil and water management practices, biodiversity protection and mitigation and adaptation measures with regard to climate change.

Basic internationally harmonised standards for sustainable agricultural production are also needed.

**We, as the EU, have started to address these challenges internationally and inside the EU to achieve even more:**

- Given the food price crisis that unfolded during 2008, which led to an increase in hunger and malnutrition in the world, an enhanced global agricultural agenda is imperative. There is a need for a coordinated, immediate international response to tackle global food and agricultural challenges. The EU supports the idea of a **Global Partnership** for agriculture, food security and nutrition and welcomes the involvement of the UN High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, as well as an implementation of the Comprehensive Framework for Action. It also welcomes the conclusion of the Madrid Conference on 26-27<sup>th</sup> January "Food Security for All", which will lead to the establishment of the Global Partnership.
- While recognizing biofuels as a means to replace fossil fuels, and thereby contribute to the combat of climate change, the EU has adopted a set of sustainability criteria as well as reporting and monitoring mechanisms for **biofuels**, aiming at avoiding environmental damage and taking into account social impacts from biofuels production and ensuring that biofuels contribute to the mitigation of climate change. The criteria will apply for biofuels in the context of the Renewable Energy Directive and the Fuel Quality Directive.

- The EU strongly supports the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which is an important global tool for fostering the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. We also support fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their use. This is essential in meeting the above-mentioned goals and for sustainable agricultural development. We urge countries that are not yet Party to the Treaty to endeavour towards their accession or ratification.
- Water is key for agriculture and agricultural production. As 70% of water is used in this sector, the pressure from agriculture on water use is critical. With a view to enhancing **water efficiency** within the agricultural sector, more efficient irrigation technologies, **water saving** technologies and improving water retention capacity of crops are promoted, which become even more relevant with regard to the adverse effects of climate change.
- The struggle against **desertification and land degradation** is a key dimension of **adaptation to climate change**, particularly in the poorest and most vulnerable countries. Climate change exacerbates desertification for example by more frequent and prolonged droughts, intense downpours or a decrease in mean precipitation. Worldwide the area affected by droughts is likely to increase. Climate change thus provokes more water stress and an increased risk of food and water scarcity and malnutrition in dry areas. Appropriate tools and measures to combat desertification and to manage drought episodes and water scarcity should help in reducing these risks and are therefore crucial for the adaptation to climate change.
- **Soil degradation** by erosion, organic matter decline, compaction, salinisation and soil biodiversity loss persists in many areas. It is estimated that soil loss by water run-off can amount to well over 2 tons/ha/year, thus outweighing soil formation processes. Moreover, soils in many areas in developing countries already contain low and further declining levels of soil organic matter, hampering soil functions such as food production or water retention. Under arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid circumstances and if not managed properly this may lead to desertification. It is therefore important to rethink the use of soil in agriculture since the availability of land (and the actual scarcity of arable land) for food production is again becoming strategically important, not only in developing but also in developed countries. The EU is promoting new natural resource management techniques and technologies that improve soil management and water efficiency. Soil management can contribute significantly to securing the food supply, improving water retention, mitigating and adapting to climate change and combating desertification at the same time.
- The EU also believes that a **better integration of land and soil protection measures into various policies** and better harmonization of information are needed to move to more sustainable use of soil resources which will help to reduce environmentally-induced migration. Therefore measures for the preservation and restoration of natural capital and which have a direct impact on agricultural production and on the incomes of affected populations should be promoted, taking into account that soil types vary greatly among countries and regions and that land is privately owned to a large extent.
- An increasing part of (the EU) agricultural area is devoted to **organic production**. For the whole EU-27, organic area was higher than 6.6 mil. ha in 2006, i.e. 3.7% of the agricultural area, and is still increasing.
- Agriculture produced 9.2% of the EU emissions of greenhouse gases in 2005, resulting from an average annual decrease of 1% per year since 2000. Efforts are ongoing to **make agriculture more sustainable, resource efficient and to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation into agriculture** and natural resource sector plans and economic development policies, strategies and activities. Production of biomass (from agriculture and forests) has a potential for climate change mitigation, provided that soil organic matter levels are maintained.

- **Agricultural research** can also substantially contribute to improving agricultural production in a sustainable way. Agricultural innovation systems have to link indigenous knowledge systems and research, and both farmers/farmers' organisations and consumers have an important role in the design of environmentally friendly ways of producing food and non-food products. Agricultural extension needs to be supported, in connection with the research, to enable the smooth **transfer of research results into practice through new technologies and innovation**.

Agriculture is a fundamental sector for sustainable development and poverty eradication in developing countries as well as in disadvantaged regions, including mountainous areas. With nearly a billion people being food insecure, attention in developing countries to agriculture and rural development in terms of policy commitment and investment levels is crucial. Given the environmental challenges, **we believe that agriculture should be at the centre of future development and poverty eradication policies. Still, such policies should be carefully designed in order not to worsen environmental problems such as drought, desertification, biodiversity loss and climate change.** Moreover the **design of these policies should also involve representatives of farmers' organisations**, incorporate farmers' knowledge and also take into account the local and regional context.

Taking these challenges into account, the EC and the EU Member States are not only contributing to enhanced Official Development Assistance (ODA) amounts to agriculture but also through more favourable trade concessions at a multilateral and bilateral level, we warmly welcome and support the **Global Partnership for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition**, which will seek to address the multifaceted issues of agricultural development and food security. We look forward to working together in this Global Partnership, taking into account the important role of developing countries, which should also be actively involved in information sharing and best practices. A key role of the Partnership will be to promote actions that foster an enabling environment for sustainable investment in agriculture - an area, which has been neglected in many developing countries in the past decades - whilst maintaining a focus on equitable, broad-based growth and the environment. In addition, we would also like to highlight that despite the lack of progress to secure a **Doha Development agenda deal** by the end of 2008, the EU is still strongly committed to achieving a comprehensive, ambitious and balanced conclusion of the DDA Round during the course of this year. There should be a concerted effort to avoid protectionist measures as these will otherwise hamper growth in trade flows and investments, which are so necessary at this juncture in the economic cycle.

Thank you for your attention.

