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SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS FOR \$30 BILLION TO RESTRUCTURE WORLD

AGRICULTURE, CREATE LONG-TERM FOOD SECURITY

As the Financing for Development Conference continued in Doha, Qatar, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called this afternoon for an infusion of \$30 billion to help restructure world agriculture and create long-term food security.

“This is not charity,” Mr. Ban stressed at a side event themed “Tackling the Food and Hunger Crisis, Investing in Food Security, Safety Nets and Small Holder Agriculture”. “It is an investment in our collective future. Ending hunger is critical to global stability and prosperity.”

He noted that in 2007, an additional 75 million people had become undernourished, a number higher than the entire population of Turkey. Food prices were still twice as high as they had been in 2002 and the situation was expected to get worse as global population grew, climate change accelerated, prices fluctuated and the financial crisis continued to unfold.

The most vulnerable people needed food today, he said, emphasizing that, for that purpose, Governments must avoid export bans. For medium-term needs, smallholder farmers must get fertilizers and seeds, and for the longer term, the underlying structural problems plaguing the food system must be solved.

Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agricultural Agency (FAO) and co-moderator of the side event, said that in the six years since Monterrey, many developing countries had fulfilled their commitments to reform, but official development assistance (ODA) had declined. At the same time, investment in agriculture remained extremely low in developing countries. About 86 per cent of people living in poverty were involved in agriculture, and almost 1 billion people in the world were on the edge of hunger.

Co-moderator Lennart Bage, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) said the global food crisis could be seen as a result of the failure to invest in agriculture in too many countries, stressing, “We cannot take food security at the global level for granted.” Emergency funds must be mobilized immediately, but long-term production must be doubled by 2050, with a secure, more varied diet that would be sustainable in the context of climate change.

The moderators introduced the Chairperson of the side event, Luisa Dias Diogo, Prime Minister of Mozambique, and panellists Sibusiso Barnabas Dlamini, Prime Minister of Swaziland; Peter Power, Minister of State for Overseas Development of Ireland; Stefano Manservigi, Director-General for Development of the European Commission; Soraya Rodriguez Ramos, Secretary of

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State for International Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain; and Nancy Birdsall, President of the Centre for Global Development.

Prime Minister Dias Diogo said her country was plagued by floods and droughts while productivity per hectare had stagnated, leaving it vulnerable to food insecurity. In 2007, Mozambique had launched its Green Revolution strategy with a focus on small-scale farmers, using a decentralized financing mechanism aimed at producing more food and increasing work opportunities in rural areas. The objective was to erase the deficit in maize, rice and wheat productivity over the next three years, with funding and technical assistance targeted to the particular need of each district. There was a need for assistance from international partners and for developing countries to share their experience of best practices.

Prime Minister Dlamini maintained that the global food, fuel and finance crises required global, coordinated action. Food was a priority and there was a necessity to help the vulnerable in the short term while boosting agricultural productivity in the long term, with the focus on small-scale farmers. Foreign direct investment had an important role to play, given the magnitude of infrastructure, technical assistance and resource needs. However, it was crucially important that such investment deliver concrete development benefits, including more employment and less hunger. In the face of the financial crisis, assistance was more important than ever and the pledges made at Monterrey and elsewhere must be fulfilled. "Global food security deserves no less an urgent response than we have seen for the financial crisis."

Mr. Power said that in the last two years his country had become increasingly concerned that there had not been enough focus on agricultural production and the need to feed everyone on the planet. The same causes of the Irish "Great Hunger" potato famine in the nineteenth century had resulted in today's food insecurity -- failed Government policies and lack of crop diversity. A report on world hunger produced by Ireland, therefore, expressed frustration at the lack of progress and the lag in extending to Africa the many techniques that had been used successfully to increase productivity in Asia. It set benchmarks for technical assistance and other resources needed, and stated that hunger was the result of a lack of political commitment and leadership. Development must focus on "putting food in the mouth of every person on this planet".

Ms. Rodriguez, emphasizing that the world food crisis had not disappeared even though the financial crisis had now taken over the media spotlight, said high food prices continue to hit the poorest people. Children were suffering stunted growth due to a lack of nutrition and could not afford to go to school because more money was needed for food. Among farmers, in particular, women suffered from "invisibility" and, in many places, from low land ownership. Aid efforts must provide small farmers with technical help, seeds and infrastructure. In addition, education and health services must reach rural areas. Rural development and food production must be boosted in a manner coherent with all other development sectors. Spain was increasing its aid for that purpose and would sponsor a conference in January to ensure coherence of efforts.

Advocating that rural development become the centre of national and international policy, Mr. Manservisi stressed that agricultural research and infrastructure augmentation should concentrate on benefiting small farmers and prioritize local and regional markets. Capacity-building should focus on training youth and keeping them in the rural areas. The European Commission's €1 billion programme would prioritize those areas, starting immediately, alongside

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emergency safety net programmes to feed those suffering from the food crisis in both rural and urban areas. For the medium term, microcredit and other resources would also be provided.

Ms. Birdsall stressed that long-term demand for food was outrunning long-term supply for many reasons, including population increase, climate change and subsidies. Volatility had also increased and prices had been rising gradually since around 2002. A spike in 2007 had led to a slight decline but food prices were still historically low in comparison to the era before the 1980s. It all added up to a situation in which supply and demand were out of sync and exacerbated by the demand for biofuels. To deal with that problem, the distortions caused by subsidized foodstuffs and biofuels should be eliminated. Food stocks should be rationalized, and research boosted dramatically.

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