



UN Sustainable Development Commission Set to Tackle Issues Underpinning Global Food Crisis

New York, 5 May – Amid rising food prices, the effects of climate change, high energy prices, resource scarcities and increasing concerns about the world's ability to feed its 6.5 billion people, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development will begin a two-year cycle aimed at tackling issues critical for increasing the global food supply in a manner that addresses concerns regarding poverty, hunger and the environment. The Commission will meet from 5-16 May in New York.

Representatives from governments, civil society, the agricultural sector, business and science will look at many of the issues at the heart of the food crisis and will identify barriers and obstacles that prevent sustainable solutions to these problems. These issues, which include agriculture, land use, rural development, drought and desertification, have a direct impact on achieving the Millennium Development Goals, especially the eradication of poverty and hunger, as well as furthering the agreements contained in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

More than 50 government ministers are expected to attend the CSD's high-level meeting, which will take place from 14-16 May.

The challenges in agriculture and rural development are made more urgent by increased land degradation, drought and desertification, particularly in Africa. Land degradation has exacerbated desertification, reducing soil fertility and food production, causing increasing hardships to rural populations.

"We can deal with this crisis," says UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. "We have the resources. We know what to do. We should consider this not only as a problem but as an opportunity."

He added, "It is a huge chance to address the root problems of many of the world's poorest people, 70 per cent of whom live as small farmers. If we help them – if we offer aid and the right mix of sound local and international policies—the solution will come."

The Commission will also focus on Africa, where increasing agricultural productivity and achieving food security is vital to long-term sustainable development prospects.

Food security and climate change

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for most poor rural people. Three out of four of the world's one billion poorest people live in rural areas and depend on agriculture and related activities for their livelihoods. But although most of the poor and the chronically hungry live in food producing areas, they are, nevertheless, net food purchasers.

Agriculture is also the human activity most directly affected by climate change. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), climate change is expected to put almost 50 million more people at risk of hunger by 2020.

While food production may increase with higher temperatures in some high-latitude regions, yields may drop significantly in other regions.

Climate change is expected to cause a significant productivity decline in tropical agriculture over this century, especially in Africa and South Asia. At the same time, by 2050 those two regions combined are projected to have an additional 1.8 billion people to feed. This combination poses a major threat to future food security.

Rising food prices

The recent dramatic rise in food prices, partly due to unfavourable weather events, increasing demand from rapidly growing developing countries, as well as an increase in crops used for biofuels, is already having serious consequences, especially for the poorest. For some, it will mean new opportunities – particularly poor rural producers with access to markets. But for households that are net buyers of food commodities, rising prices will cause serious problems.

The World Food Programme has recently issued an appeal for an additional \$755 million to fill a funding gap in meeting the most urgent needs to fight malnutrition and hunger. This appeal has been supported by the Secretary-General, who last week established a United Nations Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, composed of the heads of key UN agencies and institutions.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development was defined by the 1987 Brundtland Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The Commission on Sustainable Development is unique in that it brings together government delegates and representatives of major civil society groups, including women, children and youth, indigenous people, non-governmental organizations, business, academia, local authorities, scientists, workers and trade unions.

More information on CSD-16, including the full press kit, can be found at:

<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/review.htm>

CSD-16 will be webcast live at www.un.org/webcast.

Media representatives without UN credentials who wish to attend CSD meetings should contact:

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