



Countries Stress Long-Term Solutions for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Poverty as Commission on Sustainable Development Concludes

New York, 16 May – In one of the most far reaching international discussions on many of the problems that lie at the root of the current global food crisis, countries, at the Commission on Sustainable Development, emphasized the need for ramping up investment in research and development in innovative and sustainable agricultural technologies and infrastructure in developing countries.

The Commission, which concludes its two-week session today, examined the obstacles and barriers that have prevented sustainable development in the areas of agriculture, land use, rural development, drought, desertification and Africa. Countries will follow-up on these issues with firm policy recommendations at next year's meeting of the Commission.

The Session also provided a foundation for international discussions on the global food crises that will take place in the Economic and Social Council next Tuesday, 20 May in New York, and at the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome on 3-5 June.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, in an address to the Commission on Sustainable Development, said, "after a quarter century of relative neglect, agriculture is back on the international agenda, sadly with a vengeance. The onset of the current food crisis has highlighted the fragility of our success in feeding the world's growing population with the technologies of the first green revolution and subsequent agricultural improvements."

The Secretary-General stressed that agriculture needs invigorating. "We need to work together to develop a new generation of technologies and farming methods which make possible a second green revolution, one which permits sustainable yield improvements with minimal environmental damage and contributes to sustainable development goals."

"Let me be clear," said UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Sha Zukang. "We do need to address the run-away food prices as an emergency. We need to take quick, targeted action to deliver emergency food aid to the people in need." But he added that crisis management alone was not enough. "We need to make sure it does not happen again."

Many countries expressed concern during the Commission that a number of factors had contributed to the present situation, including climate change, unfair trade policies, poor land management, and a lack of roads and access to markets in rural agricultural areas.

Countries voiced concerns about the use of biofuels, but many delegations said biofuels can help overcome fossil fuel dependency and mitigate greenhouse gases and provide employment opportunities if it was done properly. Some countries indicated that they are undertaking further study to explore ways to ensure that its use contributes to sustainable development.

Many countries emphasized that extreme and wide-spread rural poverty continues to be a main barrier to combating desertification and expressed concern that implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the only legally binding, universal agreement on land issues that systematically addresses land degradation and desertification, was seriously underfunded, but that its new 10-year strategic plan opened a way for renewed commitment confronting land degradation issues.

Almost 60 ministers attended the Commission along with 680 representatives from 126 nongovernmental organizations. Representatives from civil society, including women, farmers, science, business, children and youth, local authorities, workers and trade unions, indigenous peoples and nongovernmental organizations participated far more extensively than in the past.

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