

*The Global Economic Situation and Food Security
Elements of a Statement by the Coordinator of the
High Level Task Force for Global Food Security*

Excellencies,

I am privileged to address you as the Coordinator of the UN system High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis. This was established in May 2008 in response to the urgent need to tackle both short and long term elements of the crisis. It brings together the work of UN system bodies, International Financial Institutions and the World Trade Organization in response to the needs of populations affected by food insecurity. The Task Force is chaired by the UN Secretary General. You have been addressed by several of the members of the Task Force including the Vice Chair, FAO's Director General.

You have many important issues on your agenda at this meeting in Treviso. At the same time, many of the decisions you make and conclusions you reach will have repercussions for the poorest people of our world.

I shall focus on the commitment of the Task Force Members to reducing hunger and malnutrition, and to investing in the resilience of smallholder farmers.

Governments, farmers' organizations and civil society groups, together with members of the Task Force, are deeply concerned that too many people are unable to enjoy the right to food and nutrition, to have the wherewithal to feed themselves and their families, and to be resilient in the face of economic shocks, climatic events or acts of violence. The UN Secretary General is deeply concerned that food insecurity and hunger are being experienced every day by at least one billion of the world's inhabitants. That is one person in six, or 14% of the global population, with a child dying of malnutrition every six seconds.

As we meet here today, we know that this crisis is worsening: hunger is on the increase because of the economic downturn. Formal and informal economies are contracting, trade volumes decline, and remittances decrease, millions are losing their livelihoods and social safety net programmes are threatened with cutbacks. People in the cities are finding it more difficult to feed themselves and their families. So, too, are those in rural communities. Food prices are volatile and purchasing power is falling.

There are now 500 million smallholder farmers in the world, and more than 2 billion people who depend on local agricultural systems for their livelihoods. These are the people who suffer from poverty in its most extreme form. Far removed from the world's financial centres, they are in fact those who very likely will be bearing the final brunt of the economic crisis. At the same time, smallholder farmers – who are mostly women – have the potential to provide the basis for community resilience in the face of the crisis. They need our help to do this.

For several decades these communities have felt the neglect of declining public and private investment and declining attention to agriculture. The financial crisis is accelerating that process, by taking away the availability of credit. The economic crisis is reducing purchasing power

while food prices are still high by recent standards, and near historical highs in many poor countries. Climate change and weather volatility are adding to the volatility in food prices, which has been swinging wildly in recent years.

Urgent and concerted action is needed now to prevent the hunger crisis from deepening, from becoming protracted and from having a permanent impact on the wellbeing of future generations.

We are encouraged by what has been achieved in 2008 and by new commitments being made now. We encourage wealthy nations not only to sustain, but to expand their response to the food crisis, as part of a wider partnership that includes Governments, civil society, the private sector and the UN.

It is clear that a two-track response is needed - (a) investing in food assistance and social safety nets for those most in need, wherever they live, and (b) scaling up investment in agriculture within developing countries, increasing opportunities for producers, pastoralists and fisher folk to access land and water, to obtain the seeds, fertilizers, credit and other inputs they need, and to benefit from post-harvest technologies.

The response should comprise the following elements:

1. Mobilizing sufficient, sustained and predictable funding for the world's anti-hunger mechanisms, including WFP's assessed needs for targeted food and nutrition assistance and safety nets, as well as the food and nutrition programmes supported by the UN system and other agencies; and calling on all nations to ensure that food purchased for humanitarian purposes is exempted from any export bans, extraordinary taxes or imposed restrictions.

[To this end, the World Food Programme needs at least US\$6 billion in 2009 to meet the assessed needs of 102 million vulnerable women, children and men, including 20 million children in school feeding programs, who are affected by chronic hunger. WFP currently only has about one sixth of this amount in the Bank. This creates an extremely challenging operating environment for a system that has to respond to hunger when it occurs].

2. Offering sustained investment in farmers' organizations, small scale agriculture, processing and marketing, through partnerships that foster growth by creating jobs in the rural economy, enable millions of newly marginalized households and their communities to become more resilient in the face of economic and climatic shocks, and help them avoid sinking deeper into poverty and hunger, and reflecting the interests of women in food security strategies, with interventions that bring direct benefit to women farmers (recognizing that about 70% of women in low-income food-deficit counties are employed in the agricultural sector).

[To this end, the HLTF members recognize that many developing country governments need help to address the needs of smallholder agriculture. They propose to establish a "Financial Coordination Mechanism" to help millions of smallholder farmers obtain streamlined assistance with accessing inputs and credit, as well as greater control over ways their produce is processed and marketed, and enable them to contribute to improved

nutrition of their households and communities. This would be achieved through more predictable support for national agriculture programmes, farmer organizations and small-scale agri-businesses. It will need substantial funding (several billion dollars a year) to be effective. Such a mechanism will involve the International Fund for Agricultural Development, FAO, the World Bank, the WFP (with its Purchase for Progress programme), UNICEF, UNDP and other entities within the High Level Task Force.]

- 3 Adjusting trade and tax policies to ensure that markets for food better meet the need of lower-income countries;
4. Expanding social protection systems in developing countries, as a means to enhance the livelihoods of the poor and reduce their risk in the face of crisis;
5. Addressing climate change and agriculture as a global issue, with science-based intergovernmental action that addresses mitigation, adaptation and accounting issues
- 6 Ensuring that all assistance, particularly multilateral support, is offered in a transparent manner, in response to national priorities and needs of vulnerable communities, where possible working through relevant regional bodies, in a way that is well coordinated and demonstrably effective.

A number of difficult and challenging issues have to be addressed by world leaders to ensure food security, to contribute to a sustainable planet and to enable households to avoid poverty in subsequent decades. The 21 agencies, funds and programmes of the High Level Task Force and the many partners with whom we work stand ready to work with you on this vital and urgent matter which impacts on future generations in all regions of our world.

Coordinator, UN System High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis: 19th April 2009