

**Secretary-General's remarks to the
General Assembly Meeting on the
Global Food and Energy Crisis**

President Kerim,

Excellencies,

Thank you for this opportunity to review progress in addressing the global food and energy crisis. As you will recall from my previous briefings, I have established, at the CEB's request, a High-Level Task Force on Food Security bringing together the UN system, including the Bretton Woods institutions and other relevant international organizations, to respond to the crisis in a coherent and coordinated way.

Even before prices started rising dramatically, nearly ten thousand children were dying from causes related to malnutrition every day. At least eight hundred million people were going to sleep hungry every night. This is a moral outrage.

At the same time, the effects of climate change – such as increased exposure to drought, rising temperatures, more erratic rainfall and extreme weather events – are threatening water and agricultural systems, potentially condemning millions more to face malnutrition and water shortages. And now, with energy costs soaring and the price of food increasing by more than 50 per cent in the past year alone, the problem is certain to worsen, potentially pushing an additional 100 million people into hunger and poverty.

The double jeopardy of high food and fuel prices threatens to undermine much of the progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

As I stated at the G8 Summit in Hokkaido, the three critical challenges to our shared humanity, and in fact to our way of life – realizing the Millennium Development Goals, addressing climate change, and responding to the global food and energy crisis – are interrelated and global in nature. And so they require a global response, through global partnerships. We cannot afford to fail or betray the hopes of those tens of millions of vulnerable. This crisis is not a short-term issue – it will require the sustained attention of governments, donors, international and regional organizations, civil society and the private sector for years to come.

The world community is already moving in this direction. At the G8 Summit, leaders of the world's richest countries made important commitments to tackle the triple challenge of climate change, the MDGs, and the food and energy crises.

In early July, the Economic and Social Council, in its Ministerial Declaration, recognized the seriousness and complexity of the global food crisis, and reiterated that its consequences require a comprehensive and coordinated response by national governments and the international community. This action is underway.

UN agencies and their partners are shifting resources and mobilizing new funds to ensure that food assistance and nutritional care reach those most in need. And we're supplying small farmers in developing countries with seeds, fertilizers and other inputs to grow more crops. That's a start. But with so many millions of people threatened by this crisis, all of us, including Member States, need to do much more – immediately. This needs to be stepped up further and sustained over the next three to five years.

Allow me to applaud today's proposal by the European Commission for a special facility worth more than 1.5 billion dollars for rapid response to the food crisis. Crucially, the money would be in addition to existing development funds, and would be provided to developing countries most in need. The funds will be disbursed in coordination with the UN Task Force and other international organizations.

To reach the MDG on reducing poverty and hunger, we need a Global Partnership for Food. Governments must be at the centre, but we all have to work together: Member States, donors, UN entities, Bretton Woods Institutions, the scientific and academic communities, businesses, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

I believe that this Global Partnership should be guided in its actions by the Comprehensive Framework for Action, before you today. The CFA has been developed by my High-Level Task Force and represents the agreed upon and consolidated guidance of all its participating agencies and organizations.

From the outset, it is important to understand what the CFA is, and what it is not. The CFA is not a "one size fits all" blueprint for a response that will work in every situation, but rather a "menu of actions" that needs to be tailored to the specific context and needs of each country and inform national governments' food security strategies.

The CFA is not a fundraising vehicle, and it does not provide detailed costing. Rather, it aims to catalyze country-level action by providing governments and key partners with the main elements for formulating responses. It recognizes that any response must take into account the specific circumstances of particular countries or regions. While many actions may require external assistance, the CFA's suggested policies and actions are intended above all to build countries' own capacities and resilience to future shocks.

The next steps we need to take are clear.

First, immediately, we must ensure that vulnerable populations are not left without urgent help in the midst of this emergency. We do this by scaling up food assistance and other nutrition interventions; increasing predictable financial support for food aid; reducing restrictions on donor contributions; and exempting purchases of humanitarian relief food from export restrictions and added export taxes. We may also need to establish a global reserve system for humanitarian food.

Second, we must act immediately to boost agricultural production this year. We do this by providing urgently needed seeds and fertilizers for the upcoming planting cycles, especially for the world's small-scale farmers.

It is high time to reverse the dramatic and deplorable downward trend in agriculture's share in official development assistance. ODA has dropped from 18 per cent 20 years ago, to just around 3 per cent today. I have urged the G8 leaders and international donors to raise this portion of ODA to agriculture from 3 per cent to at least 10 per cent.

Third, we must improve fair trade and the free flow of markets by reducing agricultural subsidies in G-8 countries. The rise in agricultural commodity prices in low-income, food-insecure countries offers an opportunity to reallocate savings to agricultural investment.

Fourth, we must significantly increase investment in agriculture and rural development so as to make it a viable sector of economy. We do this by boosting public spending on agriculture and rural infrastructure.

Fifth, we must strengthen global food commodity markets to meet the needs of all countries and people, particularly the poor, including by minimizing export restrictions and levies on food commodities to help stabilize food prices. I call again for a rapid conclusion the next World Trade Organization Doha Development round.

Sixth, Member States must reassess subsidies and tariff protection for bio-fuel production. It is true that bio-fuels will need to remain a part of the equation in our fight against climate change. But we also need to establish an international consensus and agreed policy guidelines on ways to balance the development of bio-fuels with food production priorities, ensuring complementarity.

Mr. President,

As stated earlier, the financial implications related to this crisis will require substantial political and financial commitments, from national governments and donors first and foremost, but also from the private sector, civil society and the international system. To achieve the CFA's goals, estimates suggest that between twenty-five and forty billion dollars annually may be needed. Whatever the exact sums, this is the order of magnitude required.

We have to reverse years of under-investment in agriculture and change the policies that have magnified the challenges. I urge Members of this Assembly to immediately and substantially scale up public spending to respond effectively to the pressing needs of the world's hungry people

The promises are there. Now is the time to fulfill them?jointly.

The cost of inaction would be unacceptably high. Over 100 million more people could slide into hunger. Insecurity and political instability in the most affected countries could grow, increasing not only the immeasurable human costs but also the inevitable expenses of addressing conflict. Migration would increase further. Global inflation would worsen; economic growth could stagnate. Trade opportunities between regions will be lost. Some of the important gains toward realizing the MDGs would be squandered. Worse, in 2030, world food demand will have risen by 50 per cent, and by 2050 the world's population will increase by a third.

If we do not seek lasting solutions now, more children will die each day, more families will go to bed hungry. The threats left to the next generation will be even greater.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

Addressing the global food and fuel crisis swiftly and responsibly, with the necessary sense of urgency and lasting commitment, will be one of the generational challenges that impact our collective future. Let us all live up to this responsibility.

Thank you.

New York, 18 July 2008