

Fourth Meeting of the High-Level Task Force of the Global Food Security Crisis 28 July 2008

The High Level Task Force (HLTF) held its fourth meeting on 28 July in New York under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General.

The HLTF was briefed by the Secretary-General on the G8 Summit and its outcome statement on the global food crisis issued on 8 July 2008 as well as on General Assembly discussions on the food and oil crises held on 18 and 21 July 2008. In addition, the meeting discussed support by the HLTF members for country responses to the global food crisis.

In his opening remarks, the Secretary-General noted that July had been a busy month on the food crisis with consultations at the African Union Summit, the ECOSOC segment, a special European Union conference on the food crisis, the G8 Summit, the special General Assembly session on food and oil crises, and numerous bilateral meetings he and other HLTF members had with senior government officials. He further noted that all of these interactions have reinforced the need to continue to address the food crisis in an urgent and coordinated manner.

The Secretary-General commended the HLTF members for the many initiatives that are already ongoing in response to the global food crisis and indicated that there was a huge amount still to do to address the short-term needs and the longer-term requirements.

The Secretary-General noted with satisfaction the finalization of the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) by the HLTF, which he hailed as “a great achievement” for which he has received positive feedback during his meetings.

He indicated that the CFA has set a very positive precedent for what can be achieved when all UN and Bretton Woods institutions work together closely. He stressed the need to broaden this partnership and reach out systematically to other partners such as the private sector, civil society organizations and NGOs as well as donors. He also stressed the need to translate the CFA into concrete and quick action in close partnership with national governments. This, he said, will help establish the Global Partnership he promoted as the way forward in addressing effectively the global food crisis.

Referencing the Statement of the G8 Leaders on the global food crisis, the Secretary-General indicated that the HLTF managed to have a measurable impact on the outcomes of the Summit. He further indicated that it was the first time that the G8 has focused an outcome statement on food and that it was notable, considering that food was not a formal agenda item at the G8 Summit, that a statement focusing solely on food security was issued.

The fact that the G8 leaders have agreed to keep the food issue on the table at least through the next G8 Summit was promising, the Secretary-General remarked. He stressed the need to build upon the outcome of the G8 Summit in the upcoming year and make progress on some outstanding issues where the G8’s continued political and financial commitment is indispensable, in particular a marked increase in ODA for agriculture, as well as progress in reducing agricultural subsidies.

Many countries, he said, are eager to see a continuation of the HLTF partners' close cooperation and see a replication of such coordination at the country level. Numerous countries noted that the food crisis required action that goes beyond business as usual.

The Secretary-General invited the HLTF's views on ways to implement the partnership approach in support of national governments described in Section C of the CFA. This approach, which includes HLTF members, donors, NGOs, the private sector and other stakeholders, aims at ensuring that governments are at the center of coordination and offers a unified approach in the HLTF work with governments.

HLTF Coordinator John Holmes underscored the importance of coordination at the country level with the same spirit the HLTF organizations have worked together at the global level. He stressed the need to ensure that country representatives receive the guidance and support they require. This guidance may include providing common templates, supporting country teams with global advocacy efforts, or assisting with partnership building.

The HLTF agreed on the need to focus on implementation at country level, to track the needs on the ground, to identify support needed and to monitor progress of actions undertaken.

In his concluding remarks, the Secretary-General emphasized the need to ensure that the HLTF efforts toward collaboration, coordination, and strategic support are maintained throughout the crisis and beyond, and that they are replicated in the field. We cannot afford to fail and cannot respond with business as usual, he said.

The next HLTF meeting will take place in early September.