

First meeting of the High-Level Task Force of the Global Food Security Crisis 12 May 2008

The first meeting of the High-Level Task Force (HLTF) took place in New York on 12 May 2008.

The Secretary-General, who chaired the meeting, emphasized the need for all organizations represented to combine their strengths, bridge the traditional divide between relief and development, and develop a coherent, comprehensive, and coordinated global framework for action.

Participants received an update on the preparation on the outline of the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) and the way forward in tackling immediate (e.g. food assistance; short-term productivity boosts, in particular for small holder farmers; and trade/export restrictions) and longer-term issues (e.g. bio-fuels; investments in agricultural productivity; and longer-term trade issues). The aim was to produce a broad outline of the CFA within three weeks.

Discussions focused on a number of issues relating to the food security crisis and global response, in particular the importance of making progress on immediate responses – including the need for food assistance, especially to high-risk countries, such as Haiti; the need for safety nets and more investment in agricultural research.

Members of the HLTF stressed the importance on calling on countries not to impede international exports, to help markets open up and flow freely. WFP reported that in several countries food commodities already procured for food aid purposes had been ‘trapped in export controls’.

On emergency food assistance, it was noted that while a number of large pledges were coming in to meet the WFP request for USD 775 million, only 10 percent of the funds were currently available and many of the pledges were earmarked for specific targets. The HLTF emphasized the need to work with donors on flexibility in terms of earmarking and procurement conditions.

With respect to agricultural boosts, a number of suggestions were made including; the idea of a Global Grain Reserve, which could help to bolster communities whose food stocks had been severely depleted; the need to focus on immediate assistance to affected countries, in the shape of seeds and fertilisers, to maximise the current planting cycle; and the importance to providing inputs and funding to small growers who owned less than 2 hectares and who would not otherwise be able to self-finance their inputs.

Participants also stressed the need to ensure that longer-term solutions were linked to the immediate actions.

In closing the meeting the Secretary-General expressed his appreciation for those organisations for their work on the ground and proposed a second HLTF meeting before the Rome High-Level Conference on Food Security (3-5 June).