



PHILIPPINES

STATEMENT

by

AMBASSADOR HILARIO G. DAVIDE, JR.
Permanent Representative

**ECOSOC SPECIAL MEETING
ON THE FOOD CRISIS
UN HEADQUARTERS, ECOSOC CHAMBER
21 MAY 2008**

Mr. President,

Thank you for giving the floor to the Philippines.

I must forthwith commend you for convening this special meeting to deliberate on what could easily be considered the most daunting problem of the decade, if not of the century. It affects the whole world; every home; every man and woman; every child; and even the unborn. It involves the issue of survival. It strikes at the heart of human existence. It involves the right to life itself.

The challenge is the global food crisis.

I need not presume that we are all aware of the frightening facts and figures that have led us to this meeting. Undoubtedly, we are.

Many have informed us of the causes of the food crisis. Many have put forth the various prescriptions to solve it. Our speakers in this meeting and the intervenors from the floor have given a summary of them.

In his speech in Geneva on 29 April 2008, our Secretary General outlined the actions to be taken in the short, medium and long term. He created a High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis whose primary task is to work on a comprehensive and unified response to the global food challenge. The Philippines commends him for these. Then there will be a High Level Conference on World Food Security in Rome on 3-5 June 2008 organized by the Food and Agricultural Organization.

Since I am just an ordinary layman, I am willing to accept all the findings or suggestions as to the causes of the food crisis, including those from sources with their own agenda, economic or otherwise. I am also willing to accept all the recommendations, or even just intimations thereof, as to the actions or measures to be taken to solve the crisis, also including those from sources with their agenda, economic or otherwise.

All I can contribute is to urge the UN in New York, as some have done likewise, to do something right now, and not later, to influence and muster a collective action to courageously and decisively meet the crisis with unparalleled political will – a collective action that is powered by the spirit and virtues of coherence, cooperation and coordination. This fragile world cannot afford any further delay. At the meeting on 15 May of the Friends of Human Security and at the special meeting on 16 May of the General Assembly for the briefing by the Secretary General on his recent activities, I suggested that the UN in New York must take the initiative in this regard by convening during the 62nd session of the General Assembly a thematic debate on the food crisis and, thereafter, a High Level Event on the food crisis and/or food security. An appropriate take-off point for that would be this special meeting of the ECOSOC and the thematic debate on Human Security on 22 May.

Let me add a little to that contribution by stressing a little more on the solution involving increased agricultural productivity through research. I wish to request all to reflect on a small news item in the New York Times issue of 18 May, entitled “**World’s Poor Pay Price as Crop Research Is Cut**”, and in International Herald Tribune issue of 19 May, entitled “**Global Food Supplies at Risk, financing dries up for research to save crops.**” It is an article about the *brown plant hopper*, “a small insect no bigger than a gnat”. A gnat is a tiny biting fly. It is an article on the travails of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines, the world’s main repository of rice seeds as well as genetic and other information about rice, the crop that feeds nearly half of the peoples of the world. Its research has been, unfortunately, tremendously slowed down because of cuts in funds for agricultural research. It is reported that crop by crop, country by country, agriculture research and development are lagging. It is also reported that the US is in the midst of slashing by as much as 75% its annual support for a global research network. Damage to rice crops which has caused reduced production output would have been prevented if only IRRI’s budget for research has not been cut or reduced. Right now, for instance, IRRI

reports that the brown plant hopper I mentioned earlier, "is multiplying by the billions and chewing through rice paddies in East Asia, threatening the diets of many poor people." The news item also reports that China, the world's biggest rice producer, announced last 7 May that it was struggling to control the rapid spread of these insects. A plant hopper outbreak can destroy 20% of a harvest. China is trying to hold losses to 5% in affected fields.

It is further reported that no fewer than 14 new types of genetic resistance varieties of rice have been discovered. Yet with the budget cuts, the IRRI cannot move any further to breed these traits into widely used rice varieties. If money is available for research, IRRI can accomplish the task in 4 to 7 years and save millions of people from hunger, from deaths.

Thus, the call of the hour includes the immediate positive/affirmative response from all concerned, such as the IMF, the World Bank, the Internal Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and development partners to the most basic need of the IRRI – funds for research.

Finally, after I reflected on the global food crisis in light of the IRRI report, I bought the book entitled **Common Wealth, Economics for a Crowded Planet**, whose author is one of those we heard in this meeting – Prof. Jeffrey Sachs. This is his latest book which, I think, followed his bestseller, **The End of Poverty**. In this new book, Mr. Sachs asserts that "in the twenty-first century our global society will flourish or perish according to our ability to find common ground across the world on a set of shared objectives and in the practical means to achieve them; and stresses that "The defining challenge of the twenty-first century will be to face the reality that humanity shares a common fate on a crowded planet. That common fate will require new forms of global cooperation, fundamental point of blinding simplicity that many world leaders have yet to understand or embrace". I underscore "blinding simplicity". I find no reason to disagree with him.

Only the UN can effectively seek, find and nurture that **global cooperation**. The legacy that the 62nd session of the UN must leave is the attainment of that **global cooperation** that assures not only our generation, but also the generations yet to come, human security, happiness, prosperity and peace, founded on the eternal principle that this world is one for all peoples. This, after all, is the vision-mission of the UN.

We, Member States, must be willing workers, with patience without measure and labor without cease, to attain this vision-mission.

I thank you.