



**Statement
by
Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam
Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations
at
the Special Meeting of ECOSOC on the Global Food Crisis
20th May 2008**

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We compliment you Mr. Chairman for convening this Special Meeting on the Global Food Crisis. Any crisis of a global nature requires a global response. And the United Nations and its agencies are best placed to assess such crises and provide direction for solutions to the international community. Therefore, we are encouraged that the Secretary-General has appointed a high-level Task Force and has also decided to make the High-level Conference on World Food Security in Rome, a launching pad towards concerted action at the highest level seeking global solutions to this crisis. Sri Lanka, at the highest level of Government, welcomes these initiatives by the Secretary-General, UN Specialized Agencies, as well as this Council.

Food is a primary necessity for the very survival of the human race. Therefore, the right to food is a fundamental human right. It is our common responsibility to ensure that no human being is denied this basic right. But as manifested in any crisis affecting the global community, the food crisis too will mostly affect the approximately one billion of the world population living in poverty, and the most vulnerable sections – women, children, old people, and those with disabilities. Therefore, when taking short term emergency measures at national and international level, we need to ensure that specific measures are taken to protect these sections of the world's population. We have to ensure that the poorest and the most vulnerable will not go hungry, and endeavour to establish food security safety nets for these groups. We appeal therefore to all donors to make certain that the most vulnerable communities are taken care of first and foremost. All such measures must be without condition, and with one objective; "*feed the hungry first*".

This food crisis did not arise out of a vacuum. It was simmering and waiting to erupt for an array of reasons. Some are apparent such as uneven prosperity both within and across States and regions. The increasing competition for high quality food as a result of prosperity for some, has made the demand for food higher, without compensatory changes in the supply chain or production patterns as well as a corresponding increase in investment on research and development to ensure the production of higher quality and disease resistant crops. Meanwhile, the ever increasing

cost of energy has adversely impacted not only production, but also storage and supply mechanisms, especially in countries which are deficient in energy sources. The adverse effects of climate change on food production also beg our attention. And many other factors, some complex, have combined to create the current crisis, and a response therefore needs to be well calibrated, with medium and long term perspectives, so that the international community can take measures to avoid a recurrence of a food crisis.

In taking medium and long term action, it is essential to focus on national, regional and global measures. While the implementation of these measures will be primarily a national responsibility, it is essential that we create a global framework that will support and enable action taken by national authorities. In this regard measures are urgently needed to enhance food production and to increase productivity levels particularly aimed at small scale farmers in developing countries, bearing in mind that this group, including subsistence farmers are mostly responsible for feeding those who belong to the bottom billion of the world population. Although we need to address the issue of food security more in regional and national terms, it should be done with a global support framework. A regional approach for food security is essential since food habits and production are region specific. Hence all food security mechanisms such as adequate buffer stocks, and resilient crops, will be more effective on a regional basis. However, some regions may lack adequate financial and human capacity such as knowledge and skills to launch such projects and this will require international and donor support.

More importantly, all action that we take to address this food crisis must be sustainable and must lead towards eradicating hunger and malnutrition, once and for all, globally. Therefore, donor attention and contributions that will only take care of the current crisis in the short term will not be sufficient. We must look beyond the immediate and focus on sustainability. Hence measures we take need to focus on structural adjustments including on trade and production related issues, in order to avoid a recurrence of a crisis of this nature, ever again. There is an urgent necessity in this context to enhance the capacity and purchasing power of developing country economies and empower them for self help. This however, will require provision of market access and trade facilitation not only in food production and supply chain issues but also in terms of all exports from the developing world to more affluent and developed markets. Preferential market access can empower the poor to enable them to sustain themselves.

Given the breadth and the depth of the issues involved in solving this crisis as well as the varied nature of the measures that may have to be taken for that purpose, it is evident that in order to be successful in dealing with this crisis, we have to evolve an action plan that is comprehensive and sustainable in the long term. The United Nations indeed has the capacity and expertise to lead this effort. But in the end, it is our collective will, those of the UN member States, big and small, rich and poor, exercising their respective special and differential responsibilities according to the capacities of each, that will make the difference. Sri Lanka counts itself with all those determined to support this task.

Thank you.