

**Opening Statement by Ambassador Munir Akram President of the  
Economic and Social Council  
ECOSOC Special Event: “*Food Crises in Africa*”  
Thursday, 27 October, 2005**

**Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am pleased to welcome you to the Economic and Social Council Special Event on “Food Crises in Africa”.

2. The review of progress at the recently concluded 2005 World Summit has shown that many African countries will fail to meet the target of eliminating poverty and hunger in the near future. One of the reasons for this is the continuing food crises affecting most regions in Africa, triggered by natural disasters, conflict, political instability, economic failure and the HIV/AIDS Pandemic.

3. The chronic food insecurity and the increasing number of emergency food crises represent the most serious humanitarian crisis in the African world today.

4. According to the FAO, since 1998, there have been around 20 food emergency cases every year in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa there are currently 24 countries facing significant food shortages, affecting close to 35 million people. In Southern Africa, as many as 12 million people need immediate emergency food supplies following poor cereal harvest this year. FAO predicts that the need for food aid is to sharpen even more during the

lean period of January-March 2006. Other countries and regions are also at risk.

5. Malnutrition is another huge threat in African countries. Almost one third of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, is undernourished particularly children. World Food Programme estimates that over 45% of the undernourished population in Africa is under 15 years old.

6. The 2005 World Summit called upon the Economic and Social Council to develop its ability to respond better and more rapidly to developments in the international economic, environmental and social fields” as well as “support and complement international efforts aimed at addressing humanitarian emergencies.” This Special Event on the Food Crisis in Africa is in response to the call of the Summit.

7. Our discussions today should be able to identify the required specific actions and approaches that are urgently needed to mitigate the food crises in Africa, and to discuss what could be done by the international community, the United Nations system and other international institutions to prevent their recurrence.

**Excellencies,**

8. The above statistics are a stark reminder of a tragic paradox - despite all our resources and technological wonders, we are still unable to cure this malaise in Africa that too several decades after successful “green revolutions” in other parts of the world with history of recurrent famines.

This is happening despite heroic efforts by FAO, the World Food Programme, UNICEF, and numerous other organizations and initiatives.

9. Adverse and deteriorating climate conditions and precarious dependence on rain-fed agriculture, poor infrastructure, inadequate international assistance, agricultural subsidies, HIV/AIDS, and persistent conflicts are at the root of these crises.

10. All of these factors - and probably many others – acting together in a complex web of interdependencies, contribute to the perpetuation of the crisis in Africa.

11. The situation is complex, interwoven and, in many cases embedded in history. Unless we find an effective and sustainable way of addressing these issues with all their complexities and interlinkages, we will not be able to make any difference.

12. We must act on the basis of a shared conviction that this continuing tragedy is an affront to our human compassion, our ethics, and our dignity. It is also a test of our ability to get our act together, to deliver on our Charter commitments to seek solution to international economic and social problems, by acting in a concerted, coherent and sustained manner.

13. Our deliberations today are also a reflection of our determination to act on our leaders call for ECOSOC to support and complement international efforts aimed at addressing humanitarian emergencies, including natural

disasters, in order to promote an improved, coordinated response from the United Nations.

14. I hope that our discussions today will reflect the scope and urgency of the tragedy we are facing.

**Excellencies,**

15. Our meeting will proceed with opening remarks by H. E. Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the Sixtieth Session of the General Assembly. It will be followed by statements by:

H.E. Mr. Simeon A. Adekanye, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Union.

Mr. James T. Morris, Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Programme.

Mr. Lennart Båge, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development

Mr. Henri Carsalade, Assistant-Secretary-General, Technical Cooperation Department of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization

Mr. Mark Bowden, Chief of OCHA Policy Development Branch, Office of Humanitarian Affairs, and

Ms. Julie Howard, Executive Director of Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa.

Let me welcome all our distinguished guests for joining us this morning to share their thoughts and insights on this important subject.

I now have the pleasure of inviting H. E. Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the Sixtieth Session of the General Assembly.

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