

23 October 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
on the Occasion of World Food Day Event**

Excellencies,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. Director General of FAO,
President Clinton,
Brothers and Sisters,
Dear Friends,

Our gathering today highlights our determination to take on the urgent challenge of meeting the confluence of crises affecting our world. These require simultaneous and mutually reinforcing solutions. In commemorating World Food Day under this year's theme of meeting the challenges of climate change and biofuels, we are confronted head on with the global crises of food security, climate change, energy and the global economic meltdown. These inter-related global problems require complex, long-term solutions. In short, we are dealing with global problems that require sustained global governance.

Today's meeting also highlights the fact that world leaders, not to mention the billions of people around the world who have entrusted the United Nations with their wellbeing, are turning to the United Nations for lasting solutions. People have lost confidence in quick fixes, in narrowly based solutions, often orchestrated by the very people and institutions that have created the problems in the first place.

We must begin by expanding the circle and ensuring that multiple and varied voices are heard, not simply in symbolic events or as a publicity stunt, but as legitimate stakeholders in decision-making processes at all levels from the local to the international. Now is the time to bring to forefront the voices of many of our world's scientists, our indigenous peoples and, above all, the food producers and hungry of our world. It is shameful that they must fight the forces that be for something as fundamental as a person's right to food.

Moreover, we must stop deluding ourselves and face up to the fact that the "haves" of this world must change their way of life, the patterns of consumption that show little or no regard for the disastrous impact of their lifestyle on the wellbeing of their neighbors, our brothers and sisters, and our shared home, the planet Earth.

I am convinced and heartened by the fact that today there is a fresh awakening of the need for global action. And there is a renewed awareness that the United Nations, with all its shortcomings, remains

the only truly representative world forum and as such, should take the lead in advocating for the Common Good and protecting the world's most vulnerable in a time of crisis.

The UN is changing. It has taken decades of failed development policies to realize that we must put people first, that we must listen to the voices of people most affected by the poverty that is shocking in its global dimensions. The top-down approach has enabled lopsided development and outrageous abuses. It has led to the lamentable situation where we are today.

The shameful deprivation of billions of people is inexcusable, since it is a man-made problem caused by the dominant culture's perverse logic of selfishness. It is clearly within our power to eradicate poverty, but we allow it to persist. The recent downturns, we are told by the ILO and the FAO, are tipping tens of millions more into debilitating poverty.

The unfettered pursuit of neo-liberal policies and the culture of aggressive individualism that it engenders, contradict the core values and principles of all our religious and ethical-philosophical traditions, and clash with our innate common sense.

The UN can and should be a democratic forum for governments and peoples who are calling for an end to this culture of indifference to the welfare of others. We are seeing how these economic policies have accelerated global warming and the plunder of natural resources. We see the madness of converting crops into fuel to sustain gluttonous energy appetites. To perpetuate this culture is to continue to betray our most sacred values and principles and lead us to the most terrible consequences for people and our fragile planet.

Solutions proposed within the existing economic crisis are worsening the problems. In fact, the climatic crisis obeys the same logic as the food, energy and financial crises: the logic of policies based on short-term profits and speculation for maximum accumulation of wealth. The crises cannot be fixed one by one or by technology alone. They require cross-cutting, global solutions.

Most of us here today are convinced that this food crisis does not lead inevitably to a wider human tragedy. It offers an opportunity to strengthen food security and agriculture, but we must overcome the moral mediocrity that keeps us from making the great sacrifices that the magnitude of these problems requires of us. We must show our readiness to address the underlying patterns of consumption that are clearly unsustainable. Realism, if not our conscience, should tell us that all humanity is in the same boat and that we will all sink or sail together.

As President of the United Nations General Assembly, I serve as a facilitator in the search for lasting solutions to the complex problems we face. In seeking solutions we must transcend narrowly defined national interests and make the Common Good of all our peoples, nations, as well as our fragile planet Earth, paramount. We must demonstrate a readiness to undertake difficult political and ethical decisions, and to assume the consequences and costs of these decisions.

I reiterate my appeal to donor countries that, rather than reducing assistance to developing countries, they should triple the funds available to avoid prolonged human catastrophes. We are reminded today

that donors have raised only \$2.2 billion of the \$22 billion pledged this year to promote global food security alone. Let us not wait until the poor and excluded take to the streets before we garner the resolve and resources to meet our responsibilities.

As I have argued since assuming this post, the current crises should serve to convince us, once and for all, that profound and unavoidable changes must be made in the global economic system and in the values or, rather, the anti-values driving it.

On 30 October, we are bringing together some of the great economists and policy experts of our times to share their recommendations for addressing these crises. Many others are providing the valuable inputs that will enable Member States to identify actions to advance genuine change – changes that will benefit all of us. Let us be steadfast in commitment that a strong United Nations be at the centre of this transformation process.

Thank you.