

17 February 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at a Informal Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the
Priorities of the French Presidency of the G-20 with regard to
Agriculture**

Mr. Minister,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our meeting today takes place in the context of the strengthening of the links between the United Nations and the G20. This meeting follows the constructive dialogue that the General Assembly had, on two occasions this past year, before and after the Seoul Summit, with the Korean Presidency of the G20 and the Secretary-General.

In an encouraging sign of France's desire to take part in the building of bridges between the United Nations and the G20, Mr. Jean-Daniel Levitte, the G20 Sherpa for President Sarkozy, was also present on the 16th of November last year in New York. This can only contribute to the creation of a more representative and efficient system of global governance. The informal thematic debate on global governance which I intend to organize in the General Assembly on 23 June will permit us to consider this topic in greater depth.

It is good that our first interaction with the G20 and the French Presidency is taking place relatively early in the year, as President Sarkozy has just announced his priorities for the G20 and we are still eight months away from the Cannes Summit. This will allow us, I hope, to further intensify our dialogue on the G20 agenda as the year progresses.

The French Presidency has set ambitious goals for the G20, involving not just the follow-up on decisions taken heretofore, but also undertaking new projects. Among the innovative measures being taken by the French Presidency is the convening, for the first time, of a meeting of Agriculture Ministers of the G20 this coming June.

We are privileged to have with us today Mr. Bruno Le Maire, French Minister of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries, Rural Affairs and Regional Development.

Mr. Minister, I thank you for having accepted this invitation. Allow me, before giving you the floor, to share a few thoughts with you.

Excessive volatility in the prices of raw materials, and especially in those of agricultural products, is a problem. It distorts price signals and disrupts the functioning of markets; it provokes discontent and food rioting, and affects the budgets and even the very survival of the most vulnerable populations. All the more reason, then, for us to give consideration to the causes of excessive price fluctuations, and to reflect on ways to increase supply and strengthen food security.

But sometimes, I must say, I am disquieted by what I read or hear about. We must beware of the shortcuts offered by simplistic arguments which only risk aggravating the problem: calls for protectionism, for price controls, for subsidies. Experience has shown us that measures that run counter to the laws of the market are not simply ineffective but also costly for all concerned. It seems to me that ensuring the best functioning of markets is a fundamental principle, and that increasing transparency is essential in this regard.

Price increases should not be regarded as having only negative effects. They are the simplest and most efficient means of increasing the quantities produced and of compensating for food shortages. For producers in industrialized countries as well as in developing countries, higher prices offer the prospect of fairer remuneration and higher returns. We must create conditions that also allow farmers in developing countries to benefit from higher prices. We must emphasize the opening of markets for the products of developing countries, investment in and capacity-building for producers in poor countries, and the ability of those producers to access markets, among other measures. Export restrictions and price ceilings only exacerbate volatility.

It is certainly a complicated problem that cannot be neatly summed up in a supply curve and a demand curve and instantly adjusted. Price increases affect the poorest among us most severely. Adequate social safety nets must be put in place to ensure access to food products.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we have the means to feed the planet. Let us implement the measures that will allow us to take advantage of this potential for the common good. The ideas proposed by the French Presidency constitute a salutary initiative. I hope that they will lead to significant advances in improving the living conditions of the poorest, as well as strengthen food security.

I am pleased to open this dialogue, and I now give you the floor, Mr. Minister.