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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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OPENING REMARKS AT FOOD SECURITY SUMMIT
Rome, 16 November 2009

His Excellency Giorgio Napolitano, President of Italy
The Honourable Giovanni Alemanno, Mayor of Rome
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
The Honourable Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture
Organization,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This day, more than 17,000 children will die of hunger. One every five seconds.
Six million children a year.

The world has more than enough food. Yet, today, more than one billion people
are hungry. This is unacceptable.

Last week Mr. Diouf called for a day of fasting.

I fasted yesterday. It was not easy.

But, for too many people, going without food is a daily reality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome the opportunity to address you at this important event.

I would like to acknowledge the presence here today of Ms. Josette Sheeran,
Executive Director of the World Food Programme and Mr. Kanayo Nwanze, President of
the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

Their organizations are central to our work for food security.

Food is a basic right.

Food and nutritional security are the foundations of a decent life, a sound
education and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Over the past year, we have witnessed a chain reaction ... a chain reaction that threatens the very foundations of life for millions of the world's people.

Rising energy prices drove up the cost of food and ate away the savings that people otherwise would have spent on health care or education.

It is a vicious cycle that impoverishes not only its immediate victims but all people.

The human cost of the food crisis has been enormous. Millions of families have been pushed into poverty and hunger.

Suffering on this scale spills over borders.

It sets back development and undercuts social order, as we well know. Over the past year and a half, food insecurity led to political unrest in some 30 countries.

The world responded with the greatest-ever food assistance operation.

WFP led the international effort, feeding more than 100 million people a day.

Much potential damage was averted.

Yet because the underlying problems persist, we will continue to experience such crises, again and again -- unless we act.

That is why we are here today.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The food crisis of today is a wake-up call for tomorrow.

By 2050, our planet may be home to 9.1 billion people, over two billion more than now.

At a time when the global population is growing, our global climate is changing.

By 2050 we know we will need to grow 70 per cent more food.

Yet, weather is becoming more extreme and unpredictable.

In many parts of the world water supplies are declining. Agricultural land is drying out.

Food security and climate change are deeply interconnected.

If the glaciers of the Himalaya melt, it will affect the livelihoods and survival of three hundred million people in China and up to a billion people throughout Asia.

Africa's small farmers, who produce most of the continent's food and depend mostly on rain, could see harvests drop by 50 per cent by 2020.

We must make significant changes to feed ourselves... and, most especially, to safeguard the poorest and most vulnerable.

We must ensure safety nets for those who cannot afford food.

We must transform agricultural development, markets and how food is distributed. We must do so based on a thorough understanding of the issues.

That is the only way we can meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 — not just MDG One, to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, but all the MDGs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The past year has seen some progress. Nations have put food security high on the global agenda.

There have been courageous efforts to mobilize more financial resources, improve policies, build partnerships and agree on the need to reform how global agriculture is governed.

The G8 Summit in Toyako, Japan, last year was one highlight. There, leaders committed to reverse declines in food aid and investment in agriculture.

The President of the European Commission has established a 1 billion euro European Food Facility.

Earlier this year in Madrid, a high-level meeting organized by Spain and the UN embraced the concept of a Global Partnership on Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition.

At the July G8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy, 26 nations and 14 international organizations pledged \$20 billion to implement national food security plans across the developing world.

I appreciate the leadership of U.S. President Obama and Prime Minister Berlusconi of Italy on this.

We must ensure this money is gathered and disbursed promptly.

The L'Aquila Summit established that our approach must be comprehensive, well-coordinated, with a strong role for the multilateral system and, most importantly, country-led.

Many countries, including Brazil, have shown us how we can do this effectively.

In the short-term we must continue to respond to the most urgent needs.

Our emergency food response must be sustained, well-funded and we must ensure it will not be hampered by export restrictions or by taxes.

Longer-term, we need predictable increases in funding to develop sustainable food systems that can withstand shocks such as an economic crisis or climate change.

The UN's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis has moved substantially in both these areas.

We have mobilized resources. We have carried out assessments and responded to immediate and longer-term needs, providing food assistance, safety nets and social protection.

We have increased investments in agricultural development, working with the private sector and civil society, farmers groups and research organizations.

And we have worked to help smallholder farmers, especially women.

These smallholder farmers are the heart and soul of food security and poverty reduction.

They need seeds and extension services. They need secure water supplies and they need land.

They also need to benefit from the higher productivity this will bring.

They need better market access and fairer trade.

We must resist protectionism and end subsidies that distort markets.

This, ladies and gentlemen, lies at the core of food security. Our job is not just to feed the hungry, but to empower the hungry to feed themselves.

To do this, we need a comprehensive approach.

We must support national food security strategies, such those being implemented under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme.

We value the efforts underway to revitalize the Committee on World Food Security.

We expect to see member states, civil society and the private sector fully involved in its workings.

For our part, FAO, IFAD, WFP, the World Bank and the rest of of the UN system will do what we can to make it effective.

We must work together to build trust. We need joint investment planning... predictable resources... mutual accountability.

Together, we must ensure that food is available and affordable – for all.

This is at the core of the right to food.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Today's event is critical. So is the climate change conference in Copenhagen next month.

There can be no food security without climate security.

That is why, next month in Copenhagen, we need a comprehensive agreement that will provide a firm foundation for a legally binding treaty on climate change.

We must reduce the emissions that are causing climate change.

We must keep global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius.

We must help the most vulnerable to adapt.

At the summit on climate change that I convened in September in New York, world leaders signalled their determination to reach a deal in Copenhagen.

Since then we have continued to see engagement and growing support from the highest levels of government.

I welcome Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen's invitation for world leaders to come to Copenhagen.

Now more than ever, we need the leadership of Heads of State and Government to resolve the key political issues at the heart of a global deal.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Next year the General Assembly will measure our progress towards the MDGs.

The MDGs, food security and climate change are all linked.

This week's Food Security Summit, next month's climate change meeting and the MDG Summit next September must craft a single global vision.

And they must produce results. Real results for people in real need.

Results for the one billion people who are hungry today.

Real results so millions more will not have to suffer when the next shock hits.

The world is impatient for us to make a difference.

I, too, am impatient. And I am committed.

You can count on me to support your efforts.

Thank you