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High-Level Conference on World Food Security Bulletin

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HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY HIGHLIGHTS WEDNESDAY, 4 JUNE 2008

The High-Level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy resumed on 4 June 2008, at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) headquarters in Rome, Italy. During the day and in the evening, the High-Level Segment heard statements by Heads of State and Government, Heads of Delegations and Special Guests. The Committee of the Whole (COW) held four roundtables during the day. The Informal Open-ended Working Group also met throughout the day to continue work on the draft declaration. This draft was then considered by the COW in an evening session.

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

Editor's Note: for text and audio coverage of speakers visit: <http://www.fao.org/foodclimate/conference/statements/>

The following Heads of State and Government addressed the High-Level Segment: Denis Sassou N'Guesso, the Congo; Leonel Fernández, the Dominican Republic; João Vieira, Guinea Bissau; Gabriel Ntisezerana, Burundi; María Gloria Penayo de Duarte, Paraguay; Absalom Themba Dlamini, Swaziland; Abbas El Fassi, Morocco; and Pakalitha Mosisili, Lesotho. The Vice-Prime Minister of Turkmenistan and the Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand also spoke.

Ministers, Ambassadors, or representatives from the following countries also addressed the High-Level Segment: Afghanistan; Algeria; Armenia; Australia; Austria; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Belgium; Belize; Bhutan; Burkina Faso; Cambodia; Canada; Cape Verde; Chile; Cyprus; Denmark; Ecuador; El Salvador; Finland; the Gambia; Greece; Guatemala; Guinea; Haiti; Iceland; Indonesia; Iraq; Italy; Jamaica; Jordan; Kenya; Kuwait; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Libya; Luxembourg; Malaysia; Malta; Mauritius; Moldova; Mongolia; Mozambique; Myanmar; the Netherlands; New Zealand; Nigeria; Norway; Oman; Pakistan; the Philippines; Portugal; Qatar; the Republic of Belarus; the Republic of Korea; Romania; Rwanda; Samoa; Sao Tome and Principe; Saudi Arabia; Slovakia; Sudan; Sweden; Switzerland; the Syrian Arab Republic; Togo; Turkey; Tuvalu; Uganda; Ukraine; the United Arab Emirates; the US; Uruguay; Viet Nam; and Zambia.

Representatives from the following institutions also addressed the High-Level Segment: the African Development Bank; the Commonwealth of Nations; the European Commission; the European Parliament; and the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights.

Numerous speakers identified possible causes of the food crisis, including speculation on food commodities. Some called for further research on the impacts of climate change and bioenergy on food prices. Other speakers highlighted

the linkages between the food and energy crises. Many also highlighted the food crisis as an opportunity to invest in agriculture, and for farming to "turn into business."

On international cooperation and coordination, a number of speakers welcomed the establishment of the UN High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, with some formulating specific suggestions as to how it should continue its work. A number of speakers supported further reform of the FAO and suggested it should carry on coordinating efforts on food security. Many encouraged greater inter-agency cooperation.

On climate change, various speakers called for a successful outcome to the Potsdam and Copenhagen climate conferences. Numerous speakers mentioned the impacts of climate change on food security and some representatives from developing countries urged a focus on adaptation, with a call to integrate it into agricultural planning.

Divergence of views on biofuels continued. Some speakers highlighted the impact of biofuels on food prices and argued against the use of food crops for bioenergy production. Some of these speakers encouraged the development of other forms of renewable energy. Others noted that not all types of biofuels have negative impacts, and that some can be produced sustainably. A number of speakers supported the development of international guidelines for sustainable development of biofuels. Various speakers urged research into second-generation biofuels, and one emphasized the need for research on subsidies underlying biofuel production. Some speakers from developing countries called for the elimination of these subsidies. A regional group supported the use of genetically modified organisms for biofuels production, with the necessary precautions.

On trade issues, a majority called for the successful conclusion of the Doha Round of negotiations, and many stressed the need to eliminate export restrictions and farm subsidies in developed countries, which were identified as factors contributing to the food crisis. The participation of developing countries in global food trade was also emphasized.

On financial resources, there was a general call for increased investment in agriculture, especially in Africa. One speaker emphasized the need for greater private sector involvement while others appealed to the Bretton Woods institutions or developed countries. Various developed countries made pledges to help tackle the food crisis.

A few speakers emphasized the role of women farmers. Some called for the continuation of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and noted the low level of participation of African countries.

Many described national efforts to achieve food security and some drew attention to civil unrest caused by the food crisis, as well as the fact that it may hinder reaching the Millennium Development Goals. There was also reference to the need for adoption of sustainable production and consumption patterns.

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COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

HIGH FOOD PRICES: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

This roundtable was co-chaired by Ed Schafer, US Secretary of Agriculture, and Mahamane Moussa, Minister of Agricultural Development, Niger (HLC/08/INF/1). Schafer called for increased investments in: water management; climate resilience; next-generation biofuels; and science and technology. Moussa outlined activities undertaken in his country to improve food security.

Barbara Stocking, Oxfam, called for immediate humanitarian responses and longer-term social safety nets, supported by strong government systems. Willem-Jan Laan, Unilever, outlined private-sector efforts in the face of the current food crisis. He emphasized the need for sustainability in food and biofuel production as well as for alternative energies. Joachim von Braun, International Food Policy Research Institute, supported rule-based free trade, and urged country-driven and country-owned solutions.

During the ensuing discussion, participants stressed the importance of: a focus on small-scale farmers; good governance; streamlined and accessible funding mechanisms; international trade reform; and policies linking water, energy and food.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND FOOD SECURITY: This roundtable was co-chaired by Muzahem Al Muheisen, Minister for Agriculture, Jordan, and Erik Solheim, Minister for International Development, Norway, who highlighted incentives for local land users, representation of vulnerable groups' interests, and impacts of climate change on food access (HLC/08/INF/2).

Martin Parry, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, identified recent droughts as one cause of the decline in food outputs, noting they represent early warning signals of climate change. He listed adaptive strategies, including breeding drought-resistant crops, developing irrigation strategies and infrastructure, and reducing poverty. Ulla Holm, Tetra Pak Food for Development Office, highlighted the potential role of the private sector in promoting economic growth and developing food-processing technology, and emphasized the need for public-private partnerships. Martin Khor, Third World Network, suggested that international financial institutions have promoted food imports at the expense of agricultural investments, and said policies should be changed to support greater food self-sufficiency in developing countries, particularly through sustainable agriculture.

In the context of climate change adaptation and mitigation, participants discussed: sustainable forest and water resource management; land degradation; fisheries; economic growth; expansion of the CDM; and development of insurance mechanisms. Participants also stressed the importance of empowering small-scale farmers, South-South cooperation, and the development of local agriculture and industries.

TRANSBOUNDARY PESTS AND DISEASES: This roundtable was co-chaired by Sharad Pawar, Union Minister for Agriculture and Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, India, and Jim Anderton, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, New Zealand (HLC/08/INF/7). Pawar noted that climate change alters pest and disease distribution patterns, resulting in economic and environmental risks. Anderton encouraged risk aversion in the area of biosecurity and said policies must be science-based.

Hans Herren, Millennium Institute, underscored the lack of food security of those most affected by transboundary pests and diseases, and called for better food safety nets. Declan O'Brien, International Federation for Animal Health, called for a global platform to address transboundary animal diseases. Taghi Farvar, IUCN, urged incorporating traditional knowledge into pest and disease management decisions.

In the subsequent discussion, delegates highlighted the threat of existing pests and diseases, cautioning against exclusive attention on emerging issues. There was a call for: cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses; early detection and warning; rapid response mechanisms; incorporation of farmers' knowledge; capacity building; and a focus on biodiversity, including resistant natural varieties of plants and animals.

BIOENERGY AND FOOD SECURITY: This roundtable was co-chaired by Gerda Verburg, Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the Netherlands, and Guillermo Salazar, Minister of Agricultural Development, Panama (HLC/08/INF/3). Verburg called for sustainability criteria and indicators. Salazar identified the present situation as an opportunity for sustainable development.

Anne Ruth Herkes, BP Biofuels, expressed confidence that future technological advances will allow bioenergy to deliver sustainably on its promises. Pat Mooney, Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC Group), said even second-generation biofuel crops will inevitably displace food crops, calling this "morally unacceptable." Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, Rural Hub, Senegal, called for: decentralization of agricultural policy development; consistency between sectors, particularly for energy and food policies; and more systematic research and development efforts.

Participants disagreed on the value of biofuel production, with one labeling the suggestion to stop biofuel production as "neo-colonialist." Many supported sustainable biofuels, and called for increased research and development for second-generation fuels, although some expressed concern about dismissing first-generation biofuels. Participants outlined suggestions for strategies to both encourage biofuels, and secure food supplies and environmental protection. Some called for "rational assessment" of bioenergy development, which includes a consideration of inequitable energy consumption patterns and of the need for basic electrification. One delegate lamented that the focus on bioenergy comes at the expense of developing other renewable energy sources. Another stated that biofuels are no "silver bullet," and suggested a more cautious approach.

In the evening, the COW reconvened to review the draft declaration forwarded by the Informal Open-ended Working Group. Working Group Co-Chairs Ibrahim Abu Atileh (Jordan) and David Hegwood (US) encouraged participants to act in a spirit of cooperation and adopt a declaration that could be presented to plenary on Thursday. Pakistan, on behalf of the Asian Group, supported by the African Group, the European Group, the Near East Group, the North America Group and the Southwest Pacific Group, proposed adopting the declaration *en bloc*, and cautioned against opening the text to amendments. Others, including CUBA and VENEZUELA, could not agree on the proposed text. Saint Kitts and Nevis, on behalf of the SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS), proposed the inclusion of a statement reaffirming the Mauritius Strategy for the Sustainable Development of SIDS. Mexico, on behalf of the GROUP OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES, asked for a suspension to discuss the proposals. Discussions reflected continued disagreement and the COW adjourned without consensus after 10:30 pm.