



STATEMENT BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON

AT THE

**OPENING OF THE ECOSOC SPECIAL EVENT ON
THE AFRICAN FOOD CRISIS**

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS

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I welcome this initiative to hold a Special Event on the African Food Crisis. It is an example of the revitalization of ECOSOC in practice. I commend you Mr President for continuing to bring this about. It is very much in line with the new ECOSOC mandate, as set out in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, which you just quoted. I am gratified to see presence of so many prominent speakers and a format which will allow for interactive discussion.

The President of ECOSOC has comprehensively and ably set out the scale of the crisis. I shall not repeat his words. But it is shameful that so many heavy tasks remain. We are still not good enough in providing emergency assistance when it is needed; an average of just 16% of funds for flash appeals are provided during the vital first month of a crisis. And there are still too many countries needing much more help to find long-term structural solutions to their food insecurity. We need to help countries move away from dependence on food aid. African leadership is vital in this and I am encouraged to see the increasing momentum behind the NEPAD Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme this year.

Let me briefly highlight three areas in which world leaders, through the World Summit Outcome Document, have committed this Organization to do more.

- First, they committed us to implement current reforms aimed at a better-performing UN country presence, with a strengthened role for the senior resident official, including appropriate authority, resources and accountability.**

- **Second, they asked us to further develop and improve mechanisms for the use of emergency standby capacities.**
- **Third, they mandated us to strengthen the effectiveness of the UN humanitarian response, not least through strengthening the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF).**

Getting an improved and expanded CERF up and running will make a practical difference to the lives of millions of people. And, as with conflicts, it is much better to prevent food shortages than to respond to them. To take just one example, when a locust infestation loomed and then occurred in the Sahel last year, rather than spend \$9m on preventive spraying, we ended up launching a \$100m appeal to deal with the effects. Much destruction took place and many lives were lost unnecessarily.

I know that OCHA is already working to implement all these commitments. I trust they will have our full support.

When I was Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs in the early 1990s, I met many of the people in Africa behind all the shocking statistics. I saw the loss of dignity and security that persistent food shortages bring to human beings who want no more than to provide the basics of life for their families. I hope the realities of life for these people will be in the forefront of our minds during these discussions.

Comparing that time with the present, I see reasons for hope. In the early 1990s we were for instance giving food aid to Mozambique, a

country on its knees. In the subsequent 15 years it has cut poverty by a third and doubled the number of children in school. I hope this success can inspire us to tackle the many challenges that remain. Today's meeting of ECOSOC – so timely in its organization – is an important contribution to this pursuit.