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Opening remarks by H.E. Mr. Léo Mérorès, President of ECOSOC

**ECOSOC special meeting on the global food crisis
20 May 2008**

Honourable Ministers,
Honourable Presidents of the General Assembly and Security Council,
Distinguished delegates,
Mr. Secretary-General,

We face a growing food crisis worldwide. It threatens to undermine the modest progress achieved in recent years to lift millions of people out of poverty, and to mitigate the effects of hunger and malnutrition amongst the world's most vulnerable, particularly the urban poor, rural landless peasants, women and children.

The causes of today's soaring global food prices and shortages are many, brought on by a complexity of factors. The impacts however are deep and pervasive. For some, rising food prices are merely an inconvenience--a problem for the daily budget. But it is not a matter of life and death. However, in many parts of the world, it means survival. The crisis could not have come at a worse time for many countries, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa, where recent economic gains now face the threat of reversal. .

The global food crisis not only affects the health and survival of millions around the world--it also threatens the political and economic stability of governments in those areas where hunger and malnutrition are most acute. In recent months, many countries, including my own, have had to respond to protests and riots as a result of rising food costs.

In recognition of the multiple crises that could result from this single crisis and the need to coherent, integrated and coordinated approach by the United Nations as a whole, I have invited here today, the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council to share with us their views on how the United Nations can respond effectively to the crisis

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The time to act is now. As we push forward in our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, it is vital that we address this challenge effectively and comprehensively. Firstly, we need to meet immediate humanitarian needs. But we must also ensure sufficient food supplies for the future, through increased agricultural production. Indeed, it is my view that agriculture has to be put back in the centre of the development agenda. We need to concentrate efforts on minimizing greenhouse emissions, deforestation and global warming, while finding ways to promote investments in agriculture maximize the use of agro-science and technology, with the aim of reducing the costs of production and substantially increasing the productivity and output of every hectare of arable land.

I welcome the establishment by the Secretary-General of a High-Level Task Force on the crisis. ECOSOC, as the main body for coordination of economic and social issues in the United Nations system, stands committed to making its contribution. As you know, the Council has the advantage of bringing all stakeholders, together for a meaningful dialogue with the aim of ensuring that policies and messages are coherent and coordinated. To that end, the Council will, during its high-level and coordination segments of its substantive session this July, convene roundtable and panel discussions on various aspects of food security. Also, the Council's humanitarian segment will feature a panel discussion on the issue of humanitarian challenges related to global food aid.

Excellencies,

This is not the first time the Council has addressed the issues of food crises. An informal meeting of the Council on the food crises in Africa was held in 2005 which had called for, among other things, increased investment in agricultural and rural development. While the roots of this global crisis are different from the recurrent food shortages in Africa, the solutions are very similar. We, as a Council, would need to consider how best to address the question of food security in a meaningful way as part of our long-term agenda.

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We have the necessary knowledge and expertise to rise to the challenge confronting us. We simply need to muster the resources and the political will to bring about a successful end to this crisis in a lasting manner. We should use the present focus of attention on the problem as an opportunity to pave a path for a new approach to sustainable agriculture which would improve the lives of millions of farmers and stave off starvation and malnutrition for many more around the world.