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**Opening Statement by H.E. Mr. Léo Mérorès, Permanent Representative of Haiti to the United Nations  
and President of the Economic and Social Council**

**ECOSOC Preparatory Meeting  
“Land and Vulnerable People in a World of Change”  
17 April 2008**

Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome all of you to this meeting which is being held in preparation for the Council’s thematic debate during the high-level segment this July.

We are all very much aware of the growing unrest in many parts of the world resulting from rising food prices. Global hunger is increasing, and this phenomenon has far-reaching consequences for us all due to its impact on economic, political and social security. We are facing a crisis, and we must act urgently to address the situation. For that reason, I announced in the ECOSOC meeting with the Bretton Woods Institutions, WTO and UNCTAD held on Monday, that I intend to convene an *ad hoc* emergency meeting of the Council in early May to address this adverse development.

Of direct relevance to this critical situation are the issues of equitable and secure access to land and land use, which must be taken into account as we prepare for this year’s thematic debate in the Council on the theme of “promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development, taking into account current challenges”. These issues are critical for the two and half billion poor people struggling to survive in the face of rising challenges in a world beset by increasing land degradation, deforestation, desertification and the effects of climate change--to name but just a few. If we are to make any headway in alleviating the twin scourges of poverty and hunger, we need to ensure that the poor and vulnerable are given the opportunity of secure access to land, for this right is basic to any lasting solution for alleviating their many problems.

Indeed, the issue of securing of land access and tenure is fundamentally linked to the three pillars for achieving the Millennium Development Goals; namely, development, human rights and security. Please allow me to briefly touch on each of these three crucial pillars.

Firstly, within the context of development, secure access to land will allow the poor to benefit from the availability of natural resources, credit, improved technologies and support services, all of which are needed to improve their productivity, livelihood and incomes. This is the most realistic way in which poor families would be able to contribute to, and benefit from, national development.

Secondly, poverty is directly linked to exclusion from political processes and basic human rights. For that reason, improved access to land and respect for the land rights of the poor is a starting point in establishing respect for human rights, including equal rights of women and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Thirdly, from the standpoint of security, conflicts throughout the globe are linked to the use and control of land and other natural resources. These conflicts constrain economic opportunities, create environmental damage and, at their most extreme, lead to loss of human life. Poor households and communities all too often bear the heaviest burdens of land-related conflicts.

If we are to make any headway in our efforts to achieve the MDGs by their targeted dates, the international community must strengthen the rights of the poor to land, property and natural resources. I hope that our meeting today will provide a forum for an in-depth discussion so that we may get a better understanding of what the many obstacles and challenges are that are providing constraints in our efforts to providing more equitable and secure access to land. Such an understanding is vital if we are to make any type of assessment of the impact that the many challenges, such as the effects of increasing desertification, climate change, forced migration, weakening ecosystems and others, have on achieving sustainable land management.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The Economic and Social Council is perhaps the best venue to consider these challenges and decide on the most appropriate steps for action. We must act. I sincerely hope our deliberations today will help produce an appropriate plan of action. The livelihood and welfare of the poor and vulnerable depend on it.