

20 May 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Special Meeting of ECOSOC on the Global Food Crisis**

Deputy Secretary-General
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to express my appreciation to the President of ECOSOC, H.E. Ambassador Léo Mémorès for convening this special meeting on the global food crisis

Some have referred to the food crisis as the ‘silent Tsunami’; others prefer to call it the perfect storm: I would simply define it as an extraordinarily serious economic and social problem which deserves to be discussed by ECOSOC.

The rise of oil prices to unprecedented levels, climate changes, intensifying drought, floods and cyclones, the increasing popularity of bio-fuels, and the depletion of global food reserves have all combined to cause the current food shortage and inflation.

Furthermore, with the world economy sliding into a severe downturn, triggered by the volatile behaviour of the financial markets, as well as, soaring oil and commodity prices and the declining value of the US dollar, the current food crisis is unfolding in a rather dramatic context.

For more than two billion people today, higher food prices are a matter of daily struggle, sacrifice and survival. According to the World Bank, the food crisis could push at least 100 million poor people into even greater hunger, malnutrition and extreme poverty.

The scope and depth of the problem is clear. So are the extreme social and political consequences of inaction. The crisis has already sparked riots, strikes and social unrest.

We face a real global emergency, which needs a coordinated global response. We all have a shared responsibility to act.

The international community, through the framework of the United Nations must now act decisively, coherently and efficiently. Otherwise, the development gains we have made over the last seven years could be wiped out; even more people will fall back into extreme poverty, and prospects for achieving the Millennium Development Goals will be left in tatters.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have just returned from an official trip. The global food crisis was on the top of my agenda when I met various Heads of States and government.

In Egypt, President Mubarak briefed me on the effects on Egyptians that live below the poverty line. His government responded to rising prices and social unrest decisively by providing subsidized food to an additional 15 million people.

In Turkey, where I met Prime Minister Erdogan, he told me that his government's immediate intervention had stabilized prices to more normal levels. Turkey has also initiated long-term projects to boost agricultural productivity.

In Ramallah, I discussed the need for greater investment in agriculture with President Abbas.

Though Israel had not suffered social tensions because of the global food crisis, President Peres noted that Israel had developed agricultural technologies allowing the country to increase yields over 27 times. And, that Israel stood ready to work with the international community to resolve the crisis.

Excellencies,

I would like to commend the Secretary-General for swiftly establishing the interagency Task Force to develop a comprehensive action plan to tackle the crisis.

Securing food and financing to alleviate the impact of the crisis on the hardest hit should be our first and immediate step in a series of broader measures that the international community must take in order to successfully tackle the food crisis.

The fact that the purchasing power of the World Food Programme has fallen by over 40% in the last 10 months speaks for itself. Donors must act now to support the WFP's call for US\$ 750 million to meet emergency needs.

Bearing in mind increasing long-term demand, investment in agriculture must become more of a priority to address problems on the supply side. We need to use our best science, tools and technologies, to optimize efficiency and boost production.

We also need to implement policies that support land and resource ownership. Trade policy reforms are overdue. We need to create more of a level playing field for developing country farmers to benefit from higher prices.

All these elements should be taken into consideration in the United Nations Task Forces plan which will be presented at next month's high-level meeting in Rome.

However, our medium-term challenge must be to develop a united global framework that takes into account the interconnected nature of the problem.

There should be no doubt that the rise in oil prices has significantly contributed to the rise in food prices. A sustainable solution to the crisis must therefore be linked to oil price stability and our efforts to tackle climate change.

Excellencies,

I have been coordinating closely with the Secretary-General on how the UN system should tackle the problem. At his recent briefing, Member States reacted positively to the Secretary-General's views.

The General Assembly must play a leading role to drive forward concrete action and results.

Concerning the next steps, I have invited Under Secretary-General Sir John Holmes to brief the General Assembly on the status of the Comprehensive Action Plan next week. This will provide very useful preparation for the many delegations and world leaders that will attend the subsequent meeting in Rome.

Following this, and resonating the recent calls by Member States, I support the idea of convening a Special Session of the General Assembly to enable the international community to agree a unified strategy and take immediate, intergovernmental agreed decisions.

We must come together to demonstrate our global solidarity to overcome this crisis by announcing concrete new initiatives as part of a global, unified strategy.

I thank you.