

6 April 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Closing of the General Assembly Interactive Thematic Dialogue on the Global
Food Crisis and the Right to Food**

Excellencies,
Representatives of the United Nations System,
Representatives of Civil Society,
Brothers and Sisters All,

As we come to the close of this Thematic Dialogue on the Global Food Crisis and the Right to Food, I want to thank all of the panelists and moderators and especially the Delegates who participated so constructively in this timely exchange. I am grateful to Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Least Developed Countries, for highlighting the importance of this issue for the most vulnerable populations affected by the ongoing challenges of assuring access to adequate food supplies.

And I thank Olivier de Schutter, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, for his arguments that reminded us of the logic and the moral imperative of addressing food security from rights-based perspective.

To achieve long-term solutions to the intractable but unjustifiable problems of hunger and the lack of access to food due to poverty, we must dramatically change our production models and consumption patterns. This is a profound but inescapable challenge.

Both expert panels made it clear that we must move quickly away from monoculture and return to polyculture of food production; that we must challenge the shortsightedness of producing food for cattle and cars; that we can and must end the harm that profit-driven production is doing to the quality of our food and our very lives; and we must tap the enormous potential that resides with the efficiencies and synergies of small-scale food producers, often in stark contrast to agro-industrial production.

This meeting has demonstrated once again that the Assembly, the UN system and partners from the private sector, civil society and academia can come together to identify problems and explore solutions that reflect the concerns of all Member States. This is, of course, the role of the General Assembly mandated by the United Nations Charter.

But what is most striking about today's presentations is the wealth and diversity of views of our panelists. We have heard compelling arguments based in the solid science of the International

Assessment of Agriculture Science and Technology in Development and the practical experience of our Rome-based members of the United Nations system.

We have heard from the experts and practitioners of non-governmental organizations from around the world, including the invaluable perspectives of representatives of our indigenous peoples. This is the scope of knowledge and depth of concern that will help us to reset our collective compass in the direction of true and sustainable food security for all.

One week ago we gathered in this same chamber to discuss the international financial and monetary crisis and its impact on development with the world's leading economists, trade and labor specialists. A few days later, leaders of the world's most developed economies met in London to address the challenges of the world's economic crisis.

Glaringly absent in the G20 discussions was the global food crisis, not to mention the right to food. As compelling as the economic crisis is, the food crisis strikes the most vulnerable of all our societies in the most immediate and uncompromising manner. The hungry cannot wait till tomorrow. This is a discussion that must be high on the international agenda and you have contributed to making this possible.

I must say a few words regarding food as a fundamental human right. There are numerous reasons to support a rights-based approach to the food crisis. Guaranteeing the right to food turns the world's hungry, recipients of our food aid, into 'rights-holders'. This constitutes a radical shift in our current paradigm.

Rather than speak for the world's hungry or on their behalf, we as an international community must join our voices with theirs and speak in defense of their rights. This will, no doubt, bring into question a series of complex issues, many of which have no single or easy answers. They bring into play the role of non-food agriculture, subsidies and unjust trade regimes. If we are serious in our intent, these difficult and often contentious issues will be part of discussion.

The right to food forms part of United Nations law. As such, UN international organizations, including its financial organizations, have an obligation to take into account as part of their decision-making process, the likely impact policy options will have on the right to food.

I am convinced we must break the tendency to examine the crisis from a single perspective. I urge us all to take into account international legal obligations, emerging human rights law, the ethical and moral dilemmas intrinsic in choosing policy options, and how emerging knowledge and technologies can be used to assist developing countries and their peoples to better meet their fundamental right to food.

Let us look ahead. The UN calendar contains a series of processes and dates of great relevance to many of the issues raised here today. The Commission on Sustainable Development will meet next month to discuss agricultural policy, water, desertification and other relevant themes; in June this body will discuss the international financial and monetary crisis and its impact on development; later in the year

we will examine progress on the Millennium Development Goals; towards the end of year there is likely to be a Summit on the Food Crisis, and finally, the important negotiations on Climate Change.

I urge all Member States when examining food, trade and agricultural policy issues in this array of forums, to give serious consideration and discussion, and to bring to bear in your analysis and responses, a rights-based approach, one grounded in the right to food. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, numerous General Assembly resolutions and other legal instruments recognize the right to adequate and nutritious food.

In closing, I would like to thank my senior advisor for food policy and sustainable development, Brother David Andrews, for working with our larger community to bring together this pool of qualified and outstanding speakers. Let us continue this dialogue and press at every level for the changes that will have such a profound impact on all of us and our dear Planet.

Thank you.