

Summary: High-level Segment Roundtable 1 Responding to the Food Crisis through Sustainable Development

Dear Honorable Ministers, representatives of Government, Major Groups, UN agencies and programmes, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to summarize for you the main points we discussed in Roundtable 1 on “Responding to the Food Crisis through Sustainable Development”. We had a number of excellent presentations by resource persons in plenary as well as a rich discussion in the two sub-roundtables. I have tried to capture the highlights.

First, food security is only one of multiple crises, alongside the financial and economic crisis and the climate change crisis, which together are dealing a hard blow to the poor. The rise in undernourished population due to the food crisis has erased 20 years of progress in that area.

Participants expressed their assessment that the current food crisis is not over. Last year’s price increases were passed through faster and farther to consumers than the recent price decreases. So, the poor who must buy their food are still suffering. With the economic crisis, many developing countries are hard hit by collapsing exports, capital flight and rising unemployment.

Second, the steep food price hikes will have long-term impacts on the poor, who may spend 80% or more of their budgets on food. Food deprivation in early childhood imposes a life-long burden. Even as we work to prevent another such crisis by investing in boosting the productivity especially of small farmers, we must be prepared with safety net measures for the next crisis. It was felt that women and children should be given the highest priority during such crisis in terms of supply of food and nutrition.

Third, we need to do more to increase agricultural production, particularly but not only in Africa. Apart from a handful of countries with dynamic agricultural sectors, the supply response to the recent price increases has been weak. Small and resource poor farmers have not been able to access the inputs and the credit needed to boost supply. Land degradation and water scarcities have also hindered a strong response; likewise, poor transport and other infrastructure to get products to markets.

Participants agreed that we need to give higher priority to agriculture and food security than in the past, including in national plans of member States.

Cooperation is needed in collecting data that could be used to monitor food security at the national and other levels, including through the use of geographical information systems. Capacity building for food security monitoring and to strengthen early warning systems is needed.

The roundtable participants called for increased investment in agriculture in developing countries, including in research and development, extension, training and education, and

rural infrastructure like roads and irrigation. Participants also expressed the need to promote and reform land ownership rights, especially for women, and to redress the imbalance between the role played by women in agriculture and what women control.

Countries need to share experience in science, innovative technology, training and developing human capacities as important components in the work to overcome the world food crisis.

Other priorities mentioned were providing access to micro credit for small farmers and women, minimizing post-harvest losses through appropriate technologies and storage facilities, and improving market access at all levels – local, national, regional and global.

Participants expressed the view that biofuel production can be complementary to and carried out in harmony with food production. However concerns were also expressed on the negative impacts of biofuel production on the environment and food security. Further research is needed, however, into how to ensure sustainability of biofuel production and avoid jeopardizing food production. The Bioenergy Partnership was mentioned as a possible avenue for partnership between countries in this regard.

A number of participants emphasized that market access issues need to be addressed to provide the right incentives for food production in developing countries. Agricultural trade distortions of all kinds should be removed if developing countries' farmers are to have a fair chance of competing in world markets.

Climate change was mentioned by several participants as an important challenge for future food security. International efforts to enhance adaptation of agriculture to climate change need to be stepped, as developing country farmers will be seriously affected. Some stressed that agriculture should be included in the agenda for discussion at the climate change negotiations in Copenhagen.