



*Check Against Delivery*

**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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AT THE

**HIGH LEVEL MEETING  
ON THE  
MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs)  
THEMATIC ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION**

ON

**"POVERTY AND HUNGER"**

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**Distinguished Chairperson,**

On behalf of my delegation, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this roundtable discussion on "Poverty and Hunger" within the context of the High Level Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

We also wish to extend our warm gratitude to both the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary General of the United Nations for organizing this high level meeting. The importance and timeliness of this meeting cannot be over emphasized considering the fact that we are at midpoint of the target year 2015.

**Chairperson,**

The universal goal of eradicating extreme poverty continues to be a priority, but the number of people living in extreme poverty today makes us believe that many of our countries may not be on track to meet the MDG target of halving poverty; relative to the 1990 levels, by 2015. According to the UN Secretary General, and I quote "the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals has been uneven, and we face nothing less than a development emergency. While many developing countries are on track to achieving a few of the Goals, large disparities persist across and within countries".

Poverty contributes to malnutrition through the adverse effects of hunger, and is a contributing factor for over half of the under-five deaths in developing countries. The causes of hunger are related to the causes of poverty and one of the major causes of hunger is poverty itself. Therefore, achieving food security would continue to be a challenge worldwide since the root cause of food insecurity in developing countries is the inability of people to gain access to food due to poverty. The situation is further aggravated by other factors such as land rights and ownership, diversion of land use to non-productive use, inefficient and crude agricultural practices, drought and poor crop yields, climate change and the environmental degradation, just to name a few.

**Chairperson,**

Although the proportion of people in the world suffering from malnutrition and hunger has fallen since the early 1990s, the number of people with insufficient access to food has risen. Most of the poor in developing countries are net food buyers and with the current increase in food prices, it is estimated that about 1 billion people will go hungry, while at least another estimated 2 billion will be undernourished. This will make it even more difficult to reach the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger by 2015.

It is a sad fact that the current global food crisis has driven some additional 100 million people into poverty and continues to undermine one of the most fundamental human rights – the right to be free from hunger and malnutrition, recognized under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Universal

Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition. It also hampers development efforts, as lack of food or high cost of food in turn, compromise health, education, maternal well-being, as well as the capacity of the workforce to earn a decent living.

**Chairperson,**

It is important to understand that solving hunger effectively requires addressing the causes of poverty and that tackling hunger by providing charitable contributions of food is attacking the symptoms of poverty only and not the root causes. This is not to say that research into increasing food production should not be done, just that it should also be recognized that the deeper problem of eliminating the roots of poverty that cause hunger would allow better use of resources in the long term.

In developing countries, the current food crisis is likely to impact most heavily on women and girls, who are at the forefront of food production and agriculture. Hunger or poor nutrition in women and girls, will undermine broader efforts to promote gender equality and its related benefits in terms of education, health, and long term economic productivity – thus reversing gains in MDG 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women.

Global campaigns to fight poverty and hunger should recognize the continuous need to implement food security and agricultural policies and programmes to off-set macro-level socio-economic constraints and provide an environment favourable to agricultural production, processing, marketing, trade and access to food. However, efforts in this regard will only be effective if due consideration is given to the gender dimension. If participatory development in all its forms is to benefit from women's contributions and meet the particular needs of women, strategic and practical measures must be taken to overcome these barriers and unless specific steps are taken to ensure the equal participation of men and women, the latter shall invariably get excluded.

Thus global efforts towards reducing poverty must take into consideration the role of women and children as poverty undermines children and women's rights as well as their survival, health and nutrition, education, participation, and protection from harm and exploitation. Today, more than 30 per cent of children in developing countries and about 600 million people live on less than one US Dollar a day.

**Chairperson,**

Economic growth is a pre-requisite to poverty reduction but economic growth is not enough. Economic and social sector policies that enhance employment and income earning opportunities of the poor, such as access to land, credit, education, and health services must be in place. Also, social policies that ensure minimum safety nets for those falling behind are indispensable components of efforts to cope with the problems of poverty and hunger.

It is important to realize that in most poor, food-insecure areas and countries, the two greatest potential resources available to address hunger and malnutrition are the local people and the agricultural productivity of the land and waters. One of the key lessons emerging from successful attempts to accelerate progress in overcoming hunger is the need to take into account the human dimensions of the problem by helping people help themselves. Therefore, our common efforts must be focused in this direction.

**Chairperson,**

Turning my attention now to the local situation, The Gambia has in the past one and a half decades taken enormous strides to improve the well-being of its people. It conceived and developed its first strategy to alleviate poverty way back in 1994; at a time when poverty was hardly part of the international development agenda. The country has since then made poverty reduction the primary focus of its national development agenda. Currently we are implementing a Millennium Development Goals (MDG) based Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP II); the third in a series of medium term strategies aimed at promoting economic growth and subsequently enhancing livelihoods and reducing poverty.

The country's status vis-a-vis level of achievement of the Millennium Development Goals is mixed. Significant progress has been registered in some areas; mainly the non-income related poverty indicators in the social sectors, whilst progress has been slow with respect to the income related poverty indicators. With respect to the first MDG on Eradicating Poverty and Hunger, which is the focus of our discussion, our target is to reduce poverty to 15% by 2015 but this target is unlikely to be achieved given that currently the prevalence of income poverty is still very high (58%) and the rate of decline is very slow. Un-favourable climatic conditions leading to poor agricultural output coupled with dwindling world market prices of the main export crop groundnuts, are some of the factors associated with the continuing high levels of poverty in the country.

However, good progress has been registered in the area of reducing malnutrition among children under five and the targets are most likely to be achieved before 2015. Also, we note with pride that we have already surpassed the targets for gender parity in primary and secondary education and are working hard to reach the parity targets for tertiary education, thanks to the efforts of the government in enhancing girls' education.

On Partnership for development, the country reached HIPC completion point in December 2007 and is currently benefiting from debt relief from HIPC and MDRI resources.

**Chairperson,**

Despite these achievements, The Gambia faces numerous fundamental development challenges; mainly financial, infrastructural and human resources, which are impeding efforts to achieving the MDGs. Despite reaching HIPC completion and accessing HIPC and MDRI resources, there still remains a huge funding gap for the

current PRSP and unless there is significant increased financial support from the development partners, the country will not realize the objectives of this noble strategy. Also the Debt burden continues to hamper development as debt sustainability is an important issue for the country. Other constraints include the high attrition rate in the civil service, inadequate information collection and management systems and limited institutional capacity at both national and local levels for effective planning and implementations of the country's development agenda.

Unfavourable climatic conditions, limited availability of farm inputs and inadequacy of markets for the country's agricultural sector are also constraints to achieving the MDGs. Improving agriculture for self sufficiency in food production and development remains the country's priority. However, agricultural practices remain rudimentary and the country remains dependent on erratic rains and outside supply for most of its farming implements and materials for production. The shortage and untimely supply of resources coupled with difficulties in marketing the agriculture products, especially groundnuts, is crippling the economy and inhibiting implementation of the national development agenda.

**Chairperson,**

It is also important to tackle the issue of poverty and hunger within the global partnership framework. Therefore, my delegation calls for the further enhancement of south-south cooperation in support of special programmes for food security. This will allow more advanced countries to provide technical assistance to countries such as ours to assist in food production activities.

Furthermore, the current global food crisis is an opportunity for us all to reform trade-related policies in line with the imperatives of improving food security. The concerns of the least developed and net food importing developing countries should be fully taken into account and reforms must favour their agricultural development and not undermine their efforts to improve food security and its associated benefits.

**Chairperson,**

It is therefore no secret that The Gambia faces serious challenges with respect to achieving the MDG targets of eradicating poverty and hunger due to the high level of income poverty. The country is therefore not likely to meet these income related targets by 2015 unless there are accelerated efforts both in terms of resource availability and programme implementation. However we firmly believe that with significant increased support from our development partners, The Gambia will be one of those few countries in Africa that would have achieved most of the MDG by 2015.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to seize this opportunity to request this august assembly to pause for a moment and reflect on the plight of the poor around the world. Poverty anywhere should be a matter of concern for all of us and it is worth remembering that the plight of the poor can negatively impact the comfort and security of the more privileged and affluent members of the human society. Poverty engenders

many economic, social and political problems, it negatively affects global health and could threaten international peace and security and therefore there is the need for greater international solidarity and global partnership to alleviate poverty and hunger.

I thank you for your kind attention.