

## **FIGHTING HUNGER – The Challenge of Politics**

**Address by Mr Kofi A. Annan  
An International Conference on Huger  
hosted by Concern Worldwide**

**Dublin, 16 October 2008**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you Tom for your warm words. It is a great pleasure to be here with you, and with the many esteemed participants gathered today, all of you committed to the fight against hunger.

My deep appreciation goes to Tom Arnold and the wonderful organization he leads, Concern Worldwide, for working so hard to bring us together. My heartfelt thanks also goes to the Government of Ireland for its dedication to ending hunger in Africa, as evidenced most recently by its Hunger Task Force report and a reconfirmation of its aid commitments, included in the budget released just two days ago.

The Hunger Task Force report calls for action and real political commitment to increase the productivity of Africa's smallholder farmers, the vast majority of whom are women, if we are to succeed in ending poverty and hunger.

Ireland is a country that has known – and triumphed – over hunger. Through the tragic failure of its own agricultural system, Ireland learned first hand the importance of robust and diversified agriculture for prosperity and growth. The haunting memory of the Great Famine of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century still shapes Ireland's commitment to defeating global hunger, and has made it a leader in the global fight against hunger. I look forward to hearing more about Ireland's plans from Mr Peter Power, the Irish Minister for Overseas Development.

On this day, World Food Day, a staggering one billion people are hungry. Even as we gather here – 10,000 children will die of malnutrition. And in Africa alone, some 300 million people will suffer through yet another day of wrenching hunger.

And the situation is getting worse. The food crisis of recent months is now compounded by a global financial crisis. While national governments and international lenders scramble to inject hundreds of billions of dollars into

failing banks – the developing world goes hungry.

For although the ups and downs of the global economy may be cyclical, there is nothing cyclical about hunger in sub-Saharan Africa. There, the pattern is a steady and appalling rise. My friends, this is simply unacceptable. We must do something to stop it.

In Africa, decades of neglect of agriculture, on national and international levels, has resulted in a 12 percent *decline* in per capita food production since 1980. Cereal production is one tonne per hectare – a mere quarter of the global average. This means less food for more people – more hunger, less hope. And while hunger surges, the incredible agricultural potential of the continent languishes.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are at a critical juncture. The world food crisis awakened the global community to the need for agricultural development to end hunger and spur growth in Africa. Yet today commitments to that goal are on shaky ground. The world financial crisis now threatens to undermine further the political will needed to keep promises.

The financial crisis cannot be an excuse for inaction. We must maintain our resolve. We *can* end hunger and poverty. Doing so is critical to Africa and to a healthy and resilient global food system.

Last month, the United Nations reported on the progress made thus far towards accomplishing the Millennium Development Goals. They confirmed that although global poverty is on track to being halved by 2015, sub-Saharan Africa has fallen behind. The number of poor people there is growing.

And, astounding though it may seem, the fight against hunger and malnutrition is considered the “forgotten MDG.” As the Irish Hunger Task Force starkly reports: “In sub-Saharan Africa, 40 percent of children risk permanent physical and intellectual impairment due to malnutrition.”

Substantial progress in fighting hunger and poverty in Africa will require that governments make the fight against hunger a political priority at the highest level.

It will require a coherent and coordinated response by governments, donors and multilateral organisations.

It will require coordination across different sectors of the economy, and

partnerships between the public and private sectors geared toward achieving an African Green Revolution.

Regional and world bodies have developed frameworks for action:

- The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), adopted by African governments in 2003, pledged to achieve 6 percent annual growth rates in agricultural productivity by 2015.
- The Group of Eight, meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland, in 2005, pledged to increase official development assistance to Africa to US\$ 50 billion a year by 2010. They are but half way there.
- In June of this year, at the Food Summit in Rome, delegates from 181 nations concurred that increased investment in agriculture and enhanced agricultural productivity should be front and centre in the development agenda, and an additional \$12 billion was pledged to this goal.
- And here in this far-sighted country, the Irish Task Force report on hunger outlined clear steps for national governments – beginning with its own – and international bodies to take.

Although the frameworks are strong, progress is not fast enough.

It has been nearly four decades since the developed countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) first agreed to the target of committing 0.7% of their gross national product to ODA, official development assistance.

This goal has been confirmed and reconfirmed over the past several years. Yet less than half a dozen countries have met this target. A handful of others – Ireland among them – are on track for doing so by 2012.

Taken as a whole, ODA from the OECD countries actually *declined* in 2006 and 2007. At the same time, in 2006 alone, these countries spent US\$ 363 billion to subsidise agriculture in their own countries – nearly four times the amount the spent on ODA.

These subsidies to the world's richest farmers make it impossible for the world's poorest farmers to compete fairly, even in their own regional markets, much less the global market.

Today, farm support under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy is the single

biggest spending item in the combined EU budget. It accounts for about 43% of the whole – around \$40 billion.

However, in one sign of change, the EU will soon consider a proposal to redirect part of its unspent subsidies to support African agriculture. Such a move would be a welcome step towards addressing the inequalities that abound in trade policy.

Agricultural development is an engine of economic growth for low income countries where most people live in rural communities and farm.

To fire up the engine, we need real political leadership, such as we are seeing in Malawi.

In Malawi, President Bingu wa Mutharika and his government implemented a series of programs and reforms – from road building and market strengthening to “smart subsidies” that utilise small rural businesses to get subsidised fertilizers and improved seeds to farmers. Malawi has since gone from being a net importer to a net exporter of maize. Malawi’s success is the result of prioritizing agriculture at the highest political level. This is the kind of political leadership Africa needs.

Other African presidents and Ministers are likewise placing a high priority on agricultural development, after years of neglect. Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, and Tanzania are just a few of the countries working hard to bring about an African Green Revolution.

Only agricultural development – and, more specifically, an African Green Revolution – will end poverty and hunger in Africa, and end the continent’s unsustainable reliance on food imports and food aid.

AGRA, The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, which I am proud to chair, believes that we must focus on improving the productivity of tens of millions of smallholder farmers, the vast majority of whom are women, who produce Africa’s food. We know full well that Africa’s farmers, given the tools and the opportunity, could double or triple their yield and greatly boost their incomes,

As it is, they face badly depleted soils, crop pests and diseases, and unreliable rainfall – problems that all stand to be aggravated by climate change. In addition, our smallholder farmers have limited or no access to improved seeds, fertilizers, credit or insurance.

Creating opportunity for Africa's farmers means fixing the continent's broken agricultural value chain. We need to

- Strengthen the development and delivery of high quality seeds and fertilizers to smallholder farmers;
- Develop technologies for wise water management
- Develop markets and rural infrastructure;
- Create value-added opportunities such as food processing;
- Provide farmers and small businesses with access to affordable finance and insurance;
- And improve agricultural education from extension services to PhD programs in plant breeding.

Above all, if it is to succeed, an African Green Revolution must include a *policy* revolution. Policies are needed that bring about equity for Africa's women farmers, who do the lion's share of farming, household work, and child rearing, but receive a mouse's share of support.

Today, the African farmer is the *only* farmer who takes all the risks herself: No capital, no insurance, no price supports, and little help of any kind from governments.

This must change. We must replace the policies of neglect with a comprehensive programme of support to Africa's smallholder farmers.

The global food crisis has prompted governments from Beijing to Berlin to re-invest in agriculture, and find ways to support their farmers. Africa must do the same.

Within African countries, we need policies that enable a Green Revolution. These include policies that provide "smart subsidies" that enhance smallholders' access to seeds and fertiliser, while also building networks of rural agro-dealers to deliver those inputs through the private sector. They must ensure the safe and environmentally sound use of farm inputs and improve access to affordable financing for farmers and agricultural business. They must strengthen farmers' organisations and uphold rights to land ownership, especially for women. And they must put public resources into developing infrastructure that serves agriculture, such as roads and electrical power.

To make our Green Revolution a reality, action is also needed on an international level. External financing for African agriculture must increase from the current US\$ 1-2 billion per year to roughly US\$ 8 billion by 2010.

What then are our recommendations? Allow me to suggest four.

First, donor nations must make the eradication of hunger a core component of development strategies and assistance programmes.

Second, they must support an African Green Revolution that empowers smallholder farmers, mainly women, to move from poverty to prosperity.

Third, the OECD countries should follow the lead of countries like Ireland, Belgium, France, the UK, Germany, Finland and Spain by setting timetables to reach their ODA commitment of 0.7% of GNP. These timetables should be published.

And fourth, the proportion of ODA dedicated to ending hunger and improving smallholder agriculture should be demarcated. The Irish Hunger Task Force has set an example by setting a goal of 20 percent of ODA.

At the international level, we need a range of policies. We need to increase the transparency and accountability of donor countries and multilateral institutions, in order to ensure that their promises are kept. One proposal is the recommendation of the Irish Hunger Task Force for a UN Commissioner for Hunger.

International financial institutions should boost expenditure on medium- and long-term programmes that improve agricultural productivity and nutrition.

The international community should also consider establishing a new financial mechanism to provide the financial resources needed to boost African smallholder agriculture. Such a mechanism should tap new and additional financial resources, bring added value and remain consistent with existing structures. Funding for international agricultural research programmes should also be scaled.

Globally, we need trade policies that *support* agricultural growth in poor countries, not undermine it. We need to level the playing field in trade, and open the door for African exports at regional and global levels.

Finally, on both national and international levels, we must *reverse* the policies of abandonment. We must help Africa's smallholder farmers to attain what has eluded them for so long: fully productive and profitable farms. Africa *can* feed itself and rejoin the league of agriculture-exporting nations.

Today, there is momentum for investment and action to promote an African Green Revolution: with African governments, with international and bilateral donors, with private donors, with farmer organisations, and with the private sector.

We must build on that momentum. We cannot let the current financial crisis undermine it. We must honour our commitments, as we honour the value of every life.

An African Green Revolution that doubles or triples the productivity of smallholder farmers, preserves biodiversity, and creates rural income will play a catalytic role in ending widespread poverty and hunger. As such, it will also play a key role in ensuring a robust and resilient global food system.

Let us join forces to make the African Green Revolution a reality. Failure is not an option. Together we will succeed!

Thank you very much.

END