



STATEMENT BY MR. M.S. PURI, ACTING PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE,
DURING THE INTERACTIVE THEMATIC DIALOGUE ON THE GLOBAL FOOD
CRISIS AND THE RIGHT TO FOOD AT THE 63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON APRIL 06, 2009

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the floor.

We associate ourselves with the intervention on behalf of the G-77.

Food security is critical for developing countries. It is also the key to achieving the right to food.

Increasing world population and the fact that in large parts of the globe even basic nutrition needs remain unmet, require a focus on both increase in food production and its access.

The current global financial and economic crisis poses additional challenges in achieving food security in developing countries. However, the global crisis should not be an excuse to dilute ODA and other commitments. Measures to address the crisis must not worsen the situation either.

Agricultural production and productive capacity must be enhanced, particularly in developing countries. This is especially important to ensure their food security.

And, food aid must not discourage local food production. Nor should there be attempts to encourage major reliance on imports in the case of such a basic need as food.

High agricultural subsidies in developed countries have steadily undermined the agricultural productive capacity of developing countries, and distorted global agricultural trade. These must be significantly reduced if not eliminated.

Food security has also been affected by increasing use of food crops such as corn and soybean for producing biofuels in some developed countries with

agricultural surpluses. It is important to ensure that this trend is effectively checked and better alternatives to produce bio fuels are developed for retaining the primacy of the food crops for food purpose.

Volatility in food prices, as witnessed in the spike of last year, does not help either the farmer or the consumer. Therefore, the structural problems at the root of such volatility need to be addressed.

We must not also ignore the fact that agriculture is a livelihood issue for millions of poor farmers and their dependents in developing countries. In many countries, these constitute the vast majority of the populations. Rural and agricultural investments must be enhanced.

Climate change is exacerbating agricultural situation in developing countries. To cope with its adverse impact on food production, developing countries will be required to invest ever more on introduction of climate-resistant varieties and drought management of crops at the very least. These vastly increased investments add ever more to their already existing development challenges.

An appropriate policy framework to conserve genetic biodiversity particularly in the developing countries is essential for ensuring food security on sustainable basis. As far as India is concerned, a National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture is a key component of our National Action Plan on Climate Change.

Technology can be a key transformation agent in food production and we should be willing to look at what science can make available. The CGIAR and other international research organizations have played an important role in the past in promoting food security. There is no reason why they or other similar institutions in the public domain should not be harnessed again for securing food for all.

Regional initiatives, like food banks, have potential for immediate impact. In our region, at the New Delhi Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation [SAARC] in 2007, a SAARC Food Bank was set up to manage emergencies caused by natural and manmade calamities and food shortages, and to supplement national efforts to provide food security.

Mr. Chairman,

In our efforts to achieve the MDGs, the incidence of poverty in India declined from 36% in 1993-94 to 27.5% in 2004-05. We are also making determined efforts on the question of reducing the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

We are also cognizant of significant challenges that we face in the area of nutrition, especially child nutrition. Even today, 46% of children below three years of age are severely underweight, while a large proportion women and children is anaemic.

India has been feeding 17% of the world's population on less than 5% of the world's water and 3% of its arable land. Over a period of time, major efforts have been made to increase agricultural output, and ensure food security and self-sufficiency.

As a result of such efforts, in the year 2008-09, foodgrain production in India reached a record level of 231 million tonnes. This year too, we are expecting the same level of production. As you know, India is the world's second largest producer of both wheat and rice.

India has taken a strategic initiative for augmenting production of food crops. The National Food Security Mission aims at achieving 20 million tonnes of additional foodgrain production by targeting high potential, but low productivity, regions in the country.

Being well aware of the need for growth in both agriculture and the rural sector, especially inclusive growth, increased public investment, along with policy reforms for leveraging private sector participation, in the agriculture sector are being undertaken by the Government of India.

Other major measures include large-scale action to build rural infrastructure, waive bank loans to small and marginal farmers, provide minimum guaranteed rural employment in a big way and enhance access to rural credit.

Moreover, to ensure remunerative returns to farmers, the minimum support price for various foodgrains, which is set by the Government, has been increased for incentivising farmers to produce more food grains and for improving the terms of trade for farm sector.

While agriculture supports about 58 % of our population, it contributes only about 17% of our GDP- thus, an average farmer earns much less as compared to the National per capita income.

This fact is well recognized by us and the National Policy for Farmers formulated in 2007 lays a special emphasis on improving income of the farmers not only through improvement in crop yield levels but providing them a reasonable opportunity for employment in the non-farm sector. Already an Action Plan has been drawn up by us in this regard.

Moreover, to combat undernourishment, India operates the world's largest targeted Public Distribution System, as well as world's largest nutritional intervention programmes, 'Mid-day meal' programme for the school children and Integrated Child Development Scheme for pre school children, lactating and expectant mothers.

Mr. Chairman,

Clearly, food security is a global challenge. We must promote global cooperation, and a full implementation of the global partnership for development, so that the objectives of food security and food for all can be achieved.

Thank you.

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