

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**CONCLUDING REMARKS TO HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON
FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL****Madrid, 27 January 2009**

Prime Minister Zapatero,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you, Prime Minister Zapatero, and the Government and people of Spain, for calling us here to Madrid to focus on the shocking problem of ever-increasing world hunger and the fragility of our food security systems.

During 2008, a chain reaction pushed up food prices so high that basic rations were beyond the reach of millions of people. By the end of the year, the total number of hungry people in our world approached an intolerable one billion.

The statistics are startling, but the stories of each household affected by hunger, and each malnourished child, are truly appalling. I saw it myself in my village when I was younger. I see it now when I travel, and it never ceases to disturb me.

Parents cutting down on the food they eat to ensure their children have enough.

Households selling their animals, land or even homes to buy food.

Mothers struggling each day to protect their children from the physical and mental scars of malnutrition.

World poverty cannot be reduced without improvements in agriculture and food systems. Most poor people are farmers. Most farm work is done by women. And those efforts contribute significantly to the domestic product of poor countries.

Farmers can produce more, but not without help – credit, seeds, fertilizers and land security.

During the past year, many of the 400 million farmers who produce food from small holdings could not respond to growing demands. They lack the inputs they needed to make the most of their land, animals and rivers. Moreover, many cannot get their produce to market. Far too many joined the ranks of the hungry.

Food prices may have come down for the time being. But the number of hungry people is set to rise again. And the prospects for smallholders remain grim.

With the spreading misery of shrinking economies, communities that were starting to emerge from poverty must wrestle instead with fewer jobs, limited access to credit, and restricted market opportunities. The increasing numbers of urban poor are being hardest hit.

Poor people are constantly being put to the test by food and nutrition insecurity, the impact of climate change, water shortages and animal diseases. We need to do far more to strengthen social protection systems that promote community resilience and prevent long-term despair and destruction.

Much good work has been done in the last year. Farmers' groups, community organizations, private enterprises and governments in many of the affected countries have worked hard, often together, to tackle the crisis.

Many nations increased their domestic programmes to ensure food security.

Donors increased their assistance as best they could.

And members of the international community came together and committed to do more to help – at the high-level conference in Rome, at the African Union Assembly in Sharm el Sheikh, and at the UN General Assembly in New York.

The UN system and international financial institutions established a High Level Task Force, and committed to work together and to enable others to track our performance.

The result is an unprecedented effort to support nations and respond to the impact of the food crisis on the world's most vulnerable people.

As food prices rose and brought the number of hungry people close to one billion, we achieved the largest emergency scale-up against hunger and malnutrition in human history.

We continue to work for coherent partnerships involving the members of my High Level Task Force, governments, the private sector, civil society, and NGOs, including tens of thousands of dedicated people, many who are risking their lives under difficult and dangerous conditions.

With generous support from many nations including Saudi Arabia, we have delivered urgent food and nutrition assistance and safety net support to more than 100 million hungry people, mostly women and children, including 20 million children in school feeding programs.

We have developed robust programmes and plans to help smallholder farmers gain access to markets, credits, seeds and fertilizers. The support of the European Commission has been crucial in this regard, as was the engagement of private partners such as the Gates and Buffett foundations. Tens of millions of farmers have been helped to produce more food.

Our institutions – including FAO, WFP, IFAD and the World Bank – spared no effort to stand with those in need. Make no mistake, when funds are available, our system delivers help to where it is needed.

But Mr. Prime Minister, I understand your sense – indeed, the sense of this meeting – that we must all do more.

We worked hard to bring food assistance to those who needed it in 2008. I expect we will have to work even harder in 2009, this year of recession. In 2008, for example, we were unable to get the seeds and fertilizers to all the smallholders who needed them in two planting seasons. We must do better in 2009.

We must build on what was done last year, sustain our successes and scale up our responses, especially as the financial crisis compounds the impact of the food crisis. We must continue to meet urgent hunger and humanitarian needs by providing food and nutrition assistance and safety nets, while focusing on improving food production and smallholder agriculture. This is the twin-track approach taken in the Comprehensive Framework for Action. We should be ready to add a third track – the right to food – as a basis for analysis, action and accountability.

Mr. Prime Minister, I agree that we should reach out even more and forge a broad and inclusive movement that draws on the best available knowledge and spends money wisely, through a better coordination mechanism.

I met with members of the task force this morning. Based on their briefing and your clear messages, I have reached a number of conclusions.

First, the way forward must link actions to reduce hunger, improve food and nutrition security, broaden social protection for the vulnerable, improve agricultural production, and make trading systems work for the world's poor. We must raise the political profile of actions in all these areas, advocating for finance, action and results.

Second, we must support consultations for inclusive partnerships that help generate sustained national, regional and global level commitment for the movement against hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity. I welcome the suggestion of a Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security that is truly inclusive and broad based. In supporting the consultations to develop this partnership I will be guided by the views expressed by the range of stakeholder groups in this conference, and by follow-up discussions that involve countries, civil society and members of my High Level Task Force.

Third, countries need easier access to external assistance for their food security and smallholder farming programmes. If we can mobilize and move funds, know-how or private investment in a more consistent and predictable way, the volume of resources will increase. But if we do not get our house in order, if we do not build a responsive consortium that serves as a viable and coordinated financial mechanism for food security, the money will not come through. Our choice is as simple as that.

We have enough institutions to ensure that needs are prioritized, that proposals are assessed and that funds are made available in a coordinated, efficient and accountable way. What we need is more effective coordination within countries in the framework of the Comprehensive Framework for Action, underpinned by significantly greater resources.

I urge all of you, and those you represent, to move forward within the spirit of the Comprehensive Framework for Action in all its aspects. I also call on you to engage with WFP, FAO, IFAD, the World Bank and others in carrying their vital work.

Mr. Prime Minister,

You and the team that organized this meeting have provided a valuable forum in which to assess our progress and identify what needs to be done. Indeed, this meeting signals that there is strong collective will to support and sustain a lasting movement. I pledge that members of our High Level Task Force will do our part to make this happen.

I know you all agree that continuing hunger is a deep stain on our world. The time has come to remove it – forever. We have the wealth and know-how to do so. Let us do our utmost to keep hunger at the centre of the political lens. History will judge us on our response.

Thank you again for your commitment to this cause.