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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Seventh special session

**Written statement* submitted by the Association of World Citizens,
a non-governmental organization on the Roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 May 2008]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

World Food Policy

Citizens of the World welcome the Special Session of the Human Rights Council devoted to the Right to Food and the current world food crisis. Today, cooperation is needed among the UN family of agencies, national governments, non-governmental organizations, and the millions of food producers to respond to the food crisis which has already led to destabilizing food riots. There is a need for swift, short-term measures to help people now suffering from lack of food and malnutrition due to high food prices, inadequate distribution, and situations of violence. Such short-term action requires additional funding for the UN World Food Programme and the release of national food stocks. However, it is the longer-range and structural issues on which we must focus our attention. The world requires a World Food Policy and a clear Plan of Action.

At the Rome World Food Conference in November 1974, the then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger declared that the bold objective of the conference was that “within a decade, no child will go hungry, no family will fear for its next day’s bread, and no human being’s future and capacity will be stunted by malnutrition.” (1)

Yet in 1996, then UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali could write “There has been little progress in reducing malnutrition. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the number of malnourished children is actually rising. Almost a third of all children under five in developing countries are malnourished, and malnutrition still contributes to more than half the deaths of young children in these countries.” Even the modest Millennium Development goal of halving hunger by 2015 is not being met. Thus, we must agree with a World Bank evaluation that “The development community, and the world as a whole, has consistently failed to address malnutrition over the past decades.” (2)

A central theme which citizens of the world have long stressed is that there needs to be a *world* food policy and that a world food policy is more than the sum of national food security programs. Food security has too often been treated as a collection of national problems. Typical of this approach is the General Comment 12 on The Right to Adequate Food of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights “The Covenant clearly requires that each State party take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that everyone is free from hunger and as soon as possible can enjoy the right to adequate food. This will require the adoption of a national strategy to ensure food and nutrition security for all, based on human rights principles that define the objectives, and the formulation of policies and corresponding benchmarks.” (3)

Yet the focus on the formulation of national plans is clearly inadequate. There is a need for a world plan of action with focused attention to the role that UN and regional institutions must play if hunger is to be sharply reduced. It is clear that certain regional bodies, such as the European Union, already play an important role in setting agricultural policy both in terms of production and export policy. There may be a time when the African Union also will play a crucial role in setting policy, monitoring and coordinating agriculture.

It is certain that attention must be given to the local and national level of food production, distribution, and food security. Attention needs to be given to cultural factors, the division of labor between women and men in agriculture and rural development, in marketing local

food products, to the role of small farmers, to the role of landless agricultural labor, and land-holding patterns.

However, for the formulation of a dynamic world food policy, world economic trends and structures need to be analysed, and policy goals made clear. There are at least five areas that world citizens suggest as a focus for the Special Session: climate change, energy costs, ethanol, the food production and export policy of major agricultural production States, the role of speculation in commodities.

- 1) There is a need to intensify action on climate change. This year (2007-2008), there has been bad weather in key growing areas. Australia, normally the world's second-largest wheat exporter, has been suffering from an epic drought. This may be a result of particular weather conditions this year or may be a sign of climate change. It is necessary to analyse the impact of climate change on long-term food production and see alternative strategies.
- 2) Higher prices for food are in part a reflection of the higher price of oil and energy costs. Much modern farming is energy-intensive for producing fertilizers, running tractors, and transporting farm products to consumers, often at long distances. Oil prices are influenced by the violence and social breakdown in Iraq and heavy speculation on the oil markets. There is need both for short term measures to bring oil prices down to a reasonable level based on production costs and transportation as well as longer-range energy policies to free countries from oil dependence.
- 3) Higher prices for oil have encouraged a greater use of ethanol and other biofuels, often without consideration of the impact of the production of biofuels on land use and food production. While biofuels are likely to be useful, their use should be limited at present so that the consequences of their use can be studied and biofuels developed from non-food sources.
- 4) Governmental food and agriculture policies need to be analysed and reviewed carefully. The agricultural policies of the European Union and the larger food-exporting countries — USA, Canada, Brazil, Australia — need to be reviewed along with the impact of agricultural subsidies and export encouragement.
- 5) There needs to be a detailed analysis of the role of speculation in the rise of commodity prices. Banks and hedge funds, having lost money in the real estate mortgage packages, are now investing massively in commodities. For the moment, there is little governmental regulation of this speculation. There needs to be an analysis of these financial flows and their impact on the price of grains.

A world food policy for the welfare of all requires a close look at world institutions and patterns of production and trade. As Stringfellow Barr wrote in his 1952 book *Citizens of the World* “ Since the hungry billion in the world community believe that we can all eat if

we set our common house in order, they believe also that it is unjust that some men die because it is too much trouble to arrange for them to live.”

Notes

- 1) November 5, 1974, address to the World Food Conference. The 1974 World Food Conference was one in a series of UN-sponsored conferences calling attention to hunger and the need for food security. Major conferences with concluding statements of goals include:
 - The Special Assembly on Man's Right to Freedom from Hunger, 1963
 - Plan of Action on World Food Security, 1979
 - World Food Security Compact, 1985
 - World Summit for Children, 1990
 - International Conference on Nutrition, 1992
 - World Food Summit, 1996
 - Millennium Development Summit; 2000
 - World Food Summit Plus Five, 2001
- 2) World Bank. *Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development: A Strategy For Large-Scale Action* (2006)
- 3) UNCESCR General Comment 12, UN Doc. ECOSOC E/C12/1999/5

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