



## Economic and Social Council

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### Special meeting on the global food crisis

New York, 20 May 2008

### Letter dated 13 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith the message by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, on the occasion of the Special meeting of the Economic and Social Council on the global food crisis, held from 20 to 22 May 2008 (see annex).

I would kindly request the publication of the message as a document of the Economic and Social Council as well as its distribution to all Permanent Missions and Permanent Observer Missions of the United Nations.

*(Signed)* Maria Luiza Ribeiro **Viotti**  
Ambassador

Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations



**Annex to the letter dated 13 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council**

I wish to congratulate Ambassador Léo Mérorès, President of the Economic and Social Council and Permanent Representative of Haiti, on convening this meeting. I also wish to greet Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Permanent Representatives, delegates and high officials of the United Nations.

Ever since my very first day in office, I have devoted myself to the fight against hunger and poverty, both in Brazil and in the world.

Almost four years ago, in this chamber, before dozens of world leaders, we launched the international action against hunger and poverty. Our mobilization has yielded important results, particularly in health. However, we are fully aware that much remains to be done.

The challenge was made more dramatic by the recent increase in food prices worldwide. Demonstrations by starving men and women have occurred throughout the world and, in some cases, risked jeopardizing institutional stability. A humanitarian disaster of great magnitude is a real threat.

Today, even before such a bleak scenario materializes, price increases already affect the poorest among the poor, who spend proportionally more of their income on food. The prospect of regression in the fight against hunger and malnutrition makes the Millennium Development Goals look ever more distant.

We need to act on different fronts. As an emergency measure, we must quickly contain the most adverse effects of the current crisis. Brazil is doing its part in Haiti, by providing food assistance and supporting the rehabilitation of local agriculture.

A thorough analysis of the problem is also urgently needed, in order to better tackle it. This is a complex issue that requires an objective and unemotional examination, one that avoids jumping to conclusions. Last month, at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon correctly pointed out that the crisis has multiple causes.

Higher prices of oil and, consequently, of fertilizers, energy and transportation have all had a significant impact on the production costs of food. Seasonal price fluctuations, aggravated by serious crop failures due to climatic reasons, have also been a variable in this complex equation. Realignment of exchange rates and financial speculation with commodities have played a role as well.

However, today's worrisome pressures on the world's food stocks should not prevent us from recognizing and welcoming a novel and fortunate event: in several developing countries, an increasing number of people are now eating more and better.

The ever-expanding circle of those who eat shows that current international structures and practices are not fit to incorporate these new consumers smoothly. We must produce more food and distribute it better. But, above all, we must create conditions for poor countries to produce their own food.

Hunger spreads throughout poorer countries that suffer from a double vulnerability. They can neither afford food at ever-increasing prices nor produce it locally in sufficient quantities to feed their own populations.

But how can we explain that large countries endowed with arable land have not invested in growing food to ensure, at least, the subsistence of their populations? The answer lies essentially in the existing distortions in the international agricultural trade, particularly protectionism, which industrialized countries have practised for decades, if not centuries. Small poor farmers cannot compete with the millions in subsidies granted by rich countries to their own farmers. Unable to support themselves, farmers in many poor countries become dependent on imported food and foreign aid. Agricultural subsidies reward inefficiency, perpetuate the privileges of a few and aggravate the hunger of many.

The need to eliminate such distortions explains Brazil's effort to achieve a balanced conclusion of the Doha Round. We favour an agreement that, once and for all, places agricultural products under the World Trade Organization's multilateral disciplines.

Enforcing fair rules in international agricultural trade is fundamental, not only to eradicate hunger in the world but also to face another crucial challenge of our time: to reconcile environmental protection with energy security.

It is necessary to unveil the campaigns fostered by trade protectionism and vested interests of oil groups that attempt to demonize biofuels. On the latter they blame both the rise in food prices and global warming.

Such campaigns disregard the successful Brazilian experience with sugar cane-based ethanol. Over the last 30 years, Brazil has drastically cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions while, at the same time, reducing demand for fossil energy to the point of achieving virtual self-sufficiency in energy. We have done so with no prejudice to food production. On the contrary, over the same period, Brazilian agricultural output has increased exponentially, thanks to productivity gains, including in the production of sugar cane.

The fight against hunger and poverty must mean, first and foremost, stimulating the dormant potentialities for food production in the most vulnerable countries. Brazil is doing its part. We have invested massively in research and crop improvement. We have been offering to share our experience and knowledge with other developing countries, as illustrated by the establishment of an office of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) in Accra, Ghana, in 2007.

Biofuels may be particularly helpful to reduce energy vulnerabilities. But there is more to it. Biofuels are a source of clean and cheap renewable energy and generate income and jobs, especially in rural areas, where they contribute to sustaining a flourishing agriculture. Against that background, what is the meaning of taxing imports of ethanol, while exempting oil from import duties, when the international community discusses alternatives to fossil fuels?

Brazil does not intend to impose its model. We want the potential for biofuels to be assessed according to each country's reality. If adopted thoughtfully, they may rescue nations from food and energy insecurity. In the face of steep energy prices and the effects of global warming, it would be irresponsible to preclude, out of

prejudice, a strategic option for countries that have neither oil nor food, nor have the means to afford them.

Brazil will not shy away from this debate. On the contrary. I have invited government officials, scientists and representatives of civil society from all interested countries to participate in an international conference on biofuels, to be held in Sao Paulo, this coming November.

A comprehensive and objective review of all aspects of this issue will prove to be a valuable contribution to building a true world partnership for sustainable development. Let us work together for a dignified and prosperous life for all, as we ensure our energy security and preserve the planet for future generations.

In this endeavour, Mr. President, the role of the United Nations and, more specifically, that of the Council is fundamental. I wish you success in your work.

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