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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: poverty eradication**

Statement submitted by the Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2012/1.



Statement

Introduction

On 31 October 2011, the world population reached 7 billion people, of whom 900 million are struggling with chronic hunger. By 2050, the estimated population will be 9 billion, which will require a 70 per cent increase of food production. With poverty and hunger growing, feeding the world's poorest is the challenge of our time. The reality is that enough food is produced in the world but that there is something wrong with its distribution. It is increasing income inequality that is causing the current social crisis in the world.

Smallholder farmers and food security

The backbone of agricultural development is the world's 500 million smallholder farmers, many of whom are unfortunately living in poverty. There is therefore a need for a fundamental shift in the way agricultural development and food security are approached. Smallholder farmers need to be supported and their potential needs to be tapped in order for food to be made available at the local level and to achieve sustainable food security.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, has stated that each year up to 30 million hectares of farmland are lost to environmental degradation, to conversion to industrial use or urbanization, a trend made worse by increased competition between food and energy crops, and to speculation on farmland by private investors. He has also cautioned that smallholder farmers face the risk of exploitation under contractual farming arrangements with processing or marketing companies. He has recommended that mechanisms be introduced that could ensure greater fairness in such agreements.

According to Mr. De Schutter, smallholder farmers could be allowed to climb the value chain through the promotion of farmers' cooperatives that would process, package and market the food they produce. Farmers must have access to local markets that ensure that they are not excessively dependent on one commodity buyer who has access to the global market and who essentially acts as a gatekeeper for access to the high-value Northern countries.

Jamaican farmers have successfully grown vegetables in greenhouses, showing that an environmentally vulnerable country that had previously imported more than half of its food is now in a position to export food.

That success story can be replicated in other countries to enable them to become food-secure. The problem lies not only in the production of food but also in the lack of accessibility and purchasing power of people living in poverty, particularly smallholder farmers, indigenous peoples and those who make their living through fishing.

Working with nature

Indian environmental activist and eco-feminist, Vandana Shiva, talks about organic farming as a farmer-friendly approach to working with nature. According to her, it is not necessary to buy anything on the market, and the Earth is generously offering that we take everything from it. She reiterates the benefits of biodiversity as it produces two to five times more food per acre than the industrial monoculture.

According to Dr. Shiva, the only means of accelerating food production is through ecological farming rather than through the agro-chemical industry, which is harmful to human beings and nature with its excessive use of chemicals.

Just trade policies

Poor countries need fair trade laws to strengthen their agricultural systems. Importing cheap food is not a solution. Even in food aid programmes, the priority should be the needs of the people rather than profit for the countries providing the food aid. Farmers should be encouraged to produce the food that primarily meets the local needs. The existing trade laws should be revisited and revised to be more justice-based for all countries.

Bridging the gap

With 70 per cent of global poverty concentrated in rural areas, investment in those areas is crucial. Smallholder farmers produce food but often do not have access to markets, meaning that the middle men make the profit. Linking local producers with urban consumers could rebuild the local food system. The bargaining power of farmers needs to be improved, so that they can receive decent prices for their produce.

Poor health can be both a cause and an effect of poverty. According to the report on the *World Social Situation 2011: The Global Social Crises*, the number of undernourished people in the world rose to 1.02 billion during 2009, and vulnerable families can be pushed into poverty when a member of the family becomes ill.

Providing food aid in places where climate disasters have struck is a necessary immediate solution but the long-term perspectives need to be kept in mind. People need jobs for a sustainable income in order to combat poverty. Daily wage earners or seasonal workers need to be given wages on which they can live. Bridges need to be built between food production, food aid and food sovereignty.

In both low-income and middle-income countries, the social safety nets are small and there is growing recognition of their importance. People living in extreme poverty need extra support to move out of the poverty trap in order to become productive members of society. Food, energy and health-care prices must be regulated so that they are affordable to people living in poverty.

Right to food: a human rights issue

All States Members of the United Nations have agreed to reduce world hunger by half by 2015 as part of the Millennium Development Goals. As a result, food production has increased but hunger is also growing. Hunger should be addressed as a political issue and a violation of human rights. All human beings have the right to live and to have access to an acceptable quality and quantity of food. We urgently need a mechanism to address massive wealth accumulation and extreme poverty as stark realities of the world. Corporate social responsibility needs to be highlighted. To address those needs, there must be a strong political commitment by policymakers.

Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi said that the Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed. The resources of the Earth and the well-being of the community of life cannot be sacrificed for the greed of a few. Poverty can be eliminated with a holistic approach and a collective commitment by all stakeholders. Let that be the priority of all nations in this twenty-first century.

The organization recommends that the United Nations and Member States:

- Globally regulate food and energy prices, which have a devastating effect on people living in poverty
- Support smallholder farmers and promote organic farming in order to produce healthy and locally available food
- Strengthen the local food system by creating linkages between rural producers and urban consumers
- Encourage farmers' cooperatives
- Revisit global trade policies to ensure global food security and sovereignty
- Provide social safety nets such as food aid to those affected by climate and natural disasters and those living in extremely poor situations

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Salesian Missions, VIVAT International.