

18 October 2001

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
at the World Food Day Ceremony**

Secretary-General,
Director-General of FAO,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and honored to join in the observance of World Food Day, which commemorates the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organization in Quebec City, Canada, in 1945.

It is well known that hunger is both a cause and an effect of extreme poverty. Hunger is the consequence of lack of access to adequate and safe food, which is the most basic prerequisite for human survival. In addition to limiting the potential for sustainable development, poverty also has a severe negative impact on the natural environment.

It is shocking to realize that, at the dawn of the new millennium, almost half of the world's population is still living in poverty and one in five people live on less than a dollar a day. Of these, more than 800 million are chronically undernourished or suffering from hunger. In this sense, the theme of this year's World Food Day -- "Fight Hunger to Reduce Poverty" -- is both timely and appropriate, underscoring the fact that the problems of hunger and poverty are inter-linked and indivisible.

The world's leaders reaffirmed in their Millennium Declaration that poverty is the single most important underlying cause of major social problems, which were identified at the Madrid Children's Summit in 1991 and at the Copenhagen Social Summit in 1995. Among the various facets of the poverty problem, hunger is perhaps the most ancient and enduring, yet also the most easily preventable. This was recognized at the World Food Summit in 1996, which set forth the goal of reducing by half the number of hungry people by the year 2015. Moreover, we need to recognize that hunger is predominantly a rural problem, particularly in developing countries.

Today, as we observe World Food Day, I want to publicly add my voice to those calling for urgent and prompt action against the scourge of hunger and malnutrition. I also wish to commend the Executive-Director of FAO, and his colleagues for their preparations for the World Food Summit+5 to be held in early November. I am hopeful that the event will be an important occasion to galvanize the political will needed to deal with the problem of hunger on a global scale.

I also attach great importance to the International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Monterrey, Mexico, in March next year. In the run-up to this important conference, I

wish to call on Member States, international organizations and civil society to render their best efforts to carry out the commitments made at the World Food Summit and reiterated in the Millennium Declaration.

In my view, the most effective and expeditious way to achieve this goal is through significantly increasing Official Development Assistance to the agricultural sector. However, it is discouraging to note that the proportion of total ODA devoted to agriculture has decreased over the past few years. In order to reverse this trend, donors and the international community should step up their efforts to respond to the needs of the marginalized countries through increased policy support and investment in agriculture, rural development and food security. At the same time, governments should take the necessary steps to promote investment in agriculture and rural development at the national level. In addition, emphasis should also be placed on providing social safety nets for the most vulnerable rural populations.

In pursuing the worldwide fight against hunger and poverty, it is essential to forge partnership with major stakeholders as well as to promote transparent and effective governance at the national, regional and global levels. Considering the important role of governments in this regard, partnership between developed and developing countries should serve as a fundamental basis of cooperation. In view of the ever-increasing activities of the private sector and civil society, their knowledge, resources and potential can be of great advantage for our common endeavor.

On this World Food Day, I urge all peoples and governments, the private sector and NGOs to constructively collaborate to create a world where hunger and poverty are no longer the fate of billions of human beings. We owe this to ourselves and, especially, to the children of the world.