



EMBASSY OF
THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT
TOKYO

Africa Food Situation

Managing Challenges & Creating Opportunities

Speech by H.E. Dr. Walid Mahmoud Abdelnasser
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Professor Osterwalder, Rector of UNU

H.E. Ambassador Mtango, Ambassador of Tanzania and Dean of ADC

H.E. Yuriko Koike, Member of the House of Representatives

H.E. Mr. Shintaro Ito, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

H.E. Mr. Noritoshi Ishida, Senior Vice-Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

H.E. Ambassador Oshima, Senior Vice President, Japan International Cooperation Agency

Dr. Mitsuhiro Yokoyama, Director, FAO Japan

Mr. Kazushige Taniguchi, Special Representative, the World Bank Tokyo Office

H.E. Ambassador Likate, Ambassador of Lesotho

Ambassador Kitaro Sato, Ambassador in charge of Peace Building in Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Mr. Masayuki Yamashita, Director General, International Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Allow me at the outset to express my deepest appreciation for the United Nations University and the African Diplomatic Corp for organizing today's Symposium, as well as for the kind support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

The Symposium addresses one of the most critical issues affecting not only the prosperity and welfare of the nations but also the future of the human race itself as it tackles one of the most important basic human needs: Food. It is indeed a fact that Africa and the world at large are facing a serious food crisis but the problem is more obvious in



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Africa, especially due to the shortage in food reserves and some restrictions imposed by food exporting countries.

The FAO called for increasing the grain stocks from 14% to 19% of the total world production. While we realize the ingenuity of this proposal in the long run, there are concerns that its short term repercussions may potentially aggravate the current crisis and lead to further tensions on the demand side and increasing prices.

The unprecedented hikes in food prices made it more difficult for African countries to allocate the adequate financial resources to secure the needed quantity of food for their populations and the result is known of course: hunger and malnutrition that might be associated later with social instability, which will eventually lead to a negative impact on the way of life and the prospects of development in our planet. It is for sure that the effect of such crisis, whether economic or social, won't be limited to the African continent and might expand quickly to other parts of the world. The stakes are high and emerging challenges should be met.

Yet, the picture is not that bleak, as it is indeed an excellent opportunity for us today to exchange views and discuss ways and means of enhancing international cooperation in order to face the challenges emerging from the price hikes in raw materials, especially food, which might affect the access of a large segment of the African population to their daily needs. Again, I stress on international cooperation as the main and fundamental pillar capable of formulating a road map to face our common challenges.

As you may all know, agriculture is the major economic sector in Africa, which means that by focusing our attention on the issue of increasing food production and productivity, we will be able to reach a satisfactory degree of food security, thus giving African countries a



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window of opportunity to further turning their attention to economic development through more advanced activities as many industries are based on agriculture, without ignoring the fact that agriculture is an intensive labor activity providing working opportunities for a large segment of the African population.

It is also of great importance to stress how the food crisis in Africa is related to achieving of the Millennium Development Goals, especially goal no.1 targeting the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. A global strategy for food security has to be formulated without any further delay gathering all the stakeholders so as to coordinate future course of action.

The recent challenges associated with the global astronomical increase in food prices generated pressure in many regions and countries, especially in Africa, which place additional difficulties on attaining the first MDG, namely to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. In this regard, the Egyptian government is fulfilling its responsibilities towards its people and has achieved notable success in neutralizing the negative impact of this problem on its efforts to achieve the MDGs.

The Food summit held in Rome in June 2008 under the auspices of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) presented also a convenient opportunity to review the progress made towards achieving our mutual goals and to reiterate our determination to work together to fulfill our commitments. Some of the most important aspects debated during the summit were related to the "Bio fuel", but it proved to be difficult to reach agreement on such contentious issue.

In this regard, Egypt believes that it is about time for us to launch a dialogue that sets an international code of conduct that



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reconsiders the current expansion in the production of "Bio fuel" as an alternative source of energy, as well as setting clear standards for the responsible utilization of agricultural crops, as food for human beings, before being fuel for engines.

Japan is one of the most active international players and leading countries in the field of development and supporting developing countries to secure their basic needs as well as to fulfill their development agenda. This role was clearly revealed when Japan initiated the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) back in 1993. Recently, Japan hosted TICAD IV Summit in Yokohama in May 2008 which drew the attention of the international community to the difficulties facing the African continent and its impact on the world, especially regarding the food crisis.

One of the most remarkable outcomes of the TICAD IV was the launching of the "Coalition for African Rice Development" which is a creative cooperation framework initiated by JICA and other regional and international organizations and non-governmental organizations aimed at increasing the rice production in Africa. This will eventually contribute to a higher degree of food security and also to overall rural development and, thereby, poverty alleviation in the continent as a whole. The final target of the initiative is to double the rice production in Sub-Sahara Africa within ten years.

Egypt has been following the development of this initiative since its early beginnings and we have been engaged in a dialogue with Japanese relevant authorities on how best we can contribute to it, given the successful Egyptian experience in the production of rice, in cooperation with Japan among other parties that made Egypt a net exporter of rice, with the highest yield of rice worldwide, after being for many years an importer. We do believe that increasing the production and productivity of rice, using the Egyptian experience; will



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lead inevitably to reach the final goal of this initiative. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that during a recent visit by Ambassador Oshima, JICA's Senior Vice President, to Egypt, many aspects related to the Egyptian contribution to the Japanese initiative were tackled and coordination is currently ongoing on this matter.

Egypt has been working for many years now to cooperate with brotherly African countries through technical cooperation schemes in the context of the "Egyptian Fund for Technical Cooperation with Africa" affiliated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, especially in the field of capacity building, for African farmers and other sectors of the African population. Those schemes have covered many aspects of economic activities, with special emphasis on food production whether agricultural production, fisheries or others.

A second aspect of the Egyptian contribution to African development and increasing food production and productivity is the trilateral cooperation schemes under which Egypt conducts training courses in its relevant institutions for the African human resources with the collaboration of third countries. I can not fail here to underline many success stories for the trilateral training programs, especially those involving Egypt and Japan, through the distinguished Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), for African countries. Some concrete examples are the training course for warm water Fish Production, food processing industries and rice processing technology.

Moreover, Egypt has shown consistent interest in cooperating bilaterally with its African neighbors, especially many of the Nile Basin countries, as abundant water resources and arable lands in these countries can be used in cultivating strategic crops such as wheat and rice. This cooperation is based on mutual benefit as these African countries will benefit from Egypt's expertise which would achieve a leap in agricultural investment there. An example of such cooperation



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is that seven Egyptian companies have already expressed plans to implement agricultural projects in Uganda and a joint delegation from those companies and the government will visit Uganda in October 2008 to negotiate with their counterparts there about the contracts and the implementation details.

In conclusion, Africa, this youthful and vibrant continent rich in natural resources and witnessing improving economic performance and indicators, is always ready for sustainable, efficient, effective and mutually beneficial cooperation relationship. The challenge is now up to our development partners to be ready to march along with Africa.

I am confident that with the help of the professional and distinguished international and Japanese institutions like yours we will be able to reach our common goals. I would like also to reiterate my appreciation for giving me the opportunity to be among you today, and I wish this Symposium all fruitfulness and success.

Thank you for your attention.