



United Nations
University

*Africa Day Symposium 2008
UNU Headquarters, Tokyo
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*Opening Remarks
by Prof. Konrad Osterwalder
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Mr. Mtango, Ambassador of the United Republic of Tanzania and
Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps

Mr. Likate, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Lesotho and
Chairperson of the 2008 Africa Day Symposium,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome all of you to this – the 2008 Africa Day Symposium – organized jointly by the African Diplomatic Corps and the United Nations University. As you know, the University and the ADC have worked closely for many years now in organizing this annual event. It is both a privilege and honour for us to do so again in 2008.

The theme of this year's symposium: "Africa's Food Situation: from Crisis to Opportunities, New Perspectives for Africa" is an especially important one.

In April of this year, the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) established a High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General. The purpose of the task force was to come up with a prioritized plan of action for addressing the current crisis and to coordinate its implementation. In addressing the context of the looming crisis, the task force described the current situation as follows: "The dramatic rise over the past twelve months in global food prices and overall import bills for the poorest countries, coupled with diminishing food stocks, poses a threat to global food and nutrition security and creates a host of humanitarian, human rights, socio-economic, environmental, political, and security-related challenges." The comprehensive framework document presented by the task force provides two sets of actions to address the global food crisis – both of which were seen as "urgent." The first was to focus on immediate needs of vulnerable populations; the second to build resilience and to contribute to global food and nutrition security.

In this same vein, it is my hope that this Symposium will address itself not only to the tremendous threats that are before us, particularly in Africa, but also identify the opportunities which exist to bring about food security and also poverty reduction in Africa.

Let me give you briefly a list of some of the actions that should be considered in the context of the work of the high-level task force in considering both these threats and opportunities: We need to find ways that help to promote innovation in small and large-scale farming both in productivity and in production. At the same time, there is a need to address longstanding challenges in agricultural trade and in reducing food market volatilities. There should be a strong commitment on the part of the international community to reform agricultural subsidy programmes and market access while protecting consumers in low-income, food-importing countries. At the same time, we need to find ways to increase investment in food production in developing countries, in particular in Africa.

It is particularly important that we look both at these threats and opportunities for Africa in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. I am hopeful that our distinguished speakers and panelists will also help us to understand the measures that have

been implemented and the progress that has been achieved subsequent to commitments made at TICAD IV in late May this year in Yokohama.

I look forward very much to the presentations of our keynote speakers and to the panel discussion with the group of distinguished participants that the ADC and UNU have been able to bring together. I am sure that we will, together, have a rich and valuable dialogue.

Thank you very much.