Programme Alimentaire Mondial
Programa Mundial de Alimentos
برنامج الأغذية العالمي
The Food Aid Organization of the United Nations

STATEMENT OF THE
DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF THE UNITED NATIONS WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME
MR. JEAN-JACQUES GRAISSE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT

Monterrey, Mexico

18 March 2002

Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70, Parco de'Medici 00148 Rome, Italy
Telephone: +39-06-65131 Fax: +39-06-6590632/6590637
E-Mail: firstname.lastname@wfp.org Website: www.wfp.org

Chairperson,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

We gather here this week in the hope of establishing a new "Monterrey Consensus" to respond to the challenges of financing for development. The centrepiece of that consensus is a renewed commitment by the entire international community to mobilize the resources necessary to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. These goals include halving the rate of poverty and hunger by the year 2015. We are far from reaching these goals. Every fifth person on earth lives in poverty and nearly 800 million go hungry every day.

The three Rome-based UN agencies - FAO, IFAD and WFP - have joined together in supporting a common message to this conference. That message is simple. Reducing hunger and poverty in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals requires us to reverse the downward trend in funding for rural, agricultural, and food aid development programmes. The poor are largely rural. They depend, directly or indirectly, on the agricultural sector as the basis for their livelihoods. And for the poorest of the poor, chronic hunger threatens their physical capacity to use their most basic resource - their own labour - to take advantage of development opportunities to escape the cycle of hunger and poverty.

Given these realities, the World Food Programme shares the concerns of its Rome-based sister agencies about the continuing decline in resources provided for rural and agricultural development. When it comes to fighting hunger and rural poverty, it is a false debate to ask whether the problem is too little domestic investment or too little official development assistance. The truth is that we need both. The greatest success stories of the past decade in reducing hunger have come in countries that have combined sound national policies, robust domestic investment in agriculture and rural development, and generous and consistent levels of international development assistance. The emerging "Monterrey Consensus" recognizes this interdependence of the various tools for financing for development. All must work together and obtain adequate resourcing; none can be relegated to secondary status.

The World Food Programme, FAO and IFAD believe that reducing hunger and rural poverty requires a two-track approach. One track is direct action to target the hungry poor with immediate assistance to meet their urgent food consumption needs, preserve assets and allow them to invest time and physical energy to take advantage of longer-term development assistance. A second track is long-term investment in "pro-poor" rural and agricultural development, essential for both overall economic growth and sustainable poverty reduction. We urge all of the participants to join with us in embracing and supporting this two-track approach. For those of you who wish to engage more actively in this effort, I urge you to attend the joint IFAD, FAO, WFP and World Bank side event organized for tomorrow afternoon on the topic "Reducing Poverty and Hunger: The Critical Role of Financing for Rural Development, Food and Agriculture".

The World Food Programme is convinced that food aid for development is best suited to address the first track of this strategy - direct action to help the hungry poor. Food aid is a small portion of total Official Development Assistance (ODA), but it is still significant in absolute terms. There are those who are dismissive of the role of food aid for development, based on problems in the past, perhaps particularly with Programme food aid. But if there is one lesson the "Monterrey Consensus" should teach us it is that no potential source of development financing should be ignored: there are simply too many needs to limit our financing options unnecessarily. The solution to past concerns about food aid for development is to make food aid better, not to abandon these concerns.

This is the approach that the World Food Programme is pursuing. Under our Enabling Development Policy adopted in 1999, WFP is transforming our development programmes to stress proven cost-effective programmes targeted at the food needs of poor women and children. These programmes include mother-and-child health and nutrition activities and expanded support to school feeding.

WFP's Executive Director, Catherine Bertini, recently stated: "We have to remember that the hungry poor need our help today. Ideally, long-term economic development will help them move out of poverty in the future, but there are tens of millions of parents who wake up to the same question every morning: "How will I feed my children today?" We need to help them. If these families are malnourished, they will only fall further behind. Food aid can simultaneously meet their nutritional needs today and given them new opportunities for tomorrow. School feeding programmes, for example, have increased enrolments, especially of girls, by up to 300 percent in developing countries. What better way is there to promote development than to invest in the health and education of the world's children?

We invite governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) to join with us to adapt food aid programmes so that they can contribute to the successful realization of the goals of this conference. Take a look at what food aid can be tomorrow. You might be surprised by what it can contribute to our shared objective - ending poverty and hunger in our lifetime and, for many, ending hunger today.

==========0==========