Women: The Secret Weapon to Fight Hunger
Remarks to the Non-Aligned Movement Panel
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Good afternoon. Thank you Mrs. Mubarak, for organizing today's First Ladies Summit. Your personal leadership on women, education and hunger has inspired me and us all. It is a pleasure to be here with so many leaders and friends, such as John Kufuor, the former President of Ghana and WFP's current Ambassador Against Hunger.

On the eve of the World Food Summit we have, for the first time in history, more than one billion hungry people in the world. That means one in six will wake up tomorrow not knowing if they will be able to fill even this humble cup with food.

People often ask me, what can be done to defeat hunger? If you had all the resources in the world to end hunger, what would you do? My answer is simple: empower women, because women are the secret weapon to fight hunger. Let me explain.

In 1970 Danish Economist Ester Boserup published her seminal article "Women's Role in Economic Development" which found that throughout the developing world women were doing most of the agricultural work - in some cases, such as Africa, as much as 80 percent - for all crops, including cash crops. The situation today - nearly forty years later - remains almost the same, with women producing more than 50 percent of the total food grown

worldwide, including up to 40 percent of food in South America, 60 percent of food in Asia, and, still, 80 percent in Africa.

Despite this responsibility of producing food for their families and their communities, women farmers now only have access to five percent of all the world's agricultural services.

Gender imbalances play a key role in hunger. This year, the Global Hunger Index showed that high rates of hunger are strongly linked to gender inequalities, especially in terms of literacy and access to education. Countries with the most severe hunger problems also had high levels of gender inequality.

What we are seeing here is a world where women are responsible for holding half the sky – to cite a Chinese proverb – but are given far less than half the resources to do the job. Hungry women, particularly rural women, are not a hunger problem to be fixed, they are an "integral part of the solution," as Mrs. Mubarak told us on World Food Day last year. Women are even endangered just trying to cook food for their families for example in North Darfur, where they too often are brutally attacked when they go for firewood.

All of you are powerful leaders in your own right and I want to take this opportunity to outline three ways to unleash the power of women to fight hunger.

1. We must increase access to technology and resources. Sometimes people say why give a hungry person a fish? You must teach them how to fish. I find these women farmers to among the smartest and most knowledgeable I've met. But how can you fish if you don't a fishing pole or hook? A World Bank study found that if women received the same agricultural training and technical support as men, farm yields could rise as much as 22 percent.

WFP is taking action on this. Now that 80 percent of our donations are in cash rather than in-kind I like to say that this not your grandmother's food aid.

In Rwanda, we are working closely with city leaders from Kigali to support more than 2,000 women-headed households to learn basket weaving skills. The women learn to produce beautiful, environmentally friendly – and typically Rwandese – baskets that will be exported and sold to markets in Japan and the United States.

Another project in Rwanda supports the country's strategy to combat HIV/AIDS. In cooperation with UNDP, and local civil society organizations, we are distributing live rabbits to people living with HIV, which provides them with an income as well as better nutrition.

In Liberia, 70 percent of people's livelihoods are from farming, and women make up the majority of holders. Connecting women small holders to

markets is critical. WFP working with FAO has installed rice milling machines for farmers cooperatives, so farmers can benefit from the value-added price of milled rice. WFP made an initial purchase of rice from the cooperatives this year, and we plan a six fold increase our purchase by the second quarter of 2010 (200 tons this year; 1,200 next year).

We are also partnering with Ecobank Liberia, to provide onsite payments to smallholders, so each seller is paid in cash. Placing payments directly into the hands of women farmers, insisting on transparency on selling price and that the cooperative pass profits to each farmer has proved pivotal in building confidence in markets and cooperative marketing. Together, these programmes are helping support the vital role that women farmers play in Liberia's food security.

2. Access to Food and Nutrition. As Mrs. Mubarak said, hunger is as much about access to food as it is about production. Seventy percent of the world's hungry are woman and children. We need to focus on nutrition for woman and children. When women receive adequate nutrition they bear healthy children, breaking a negative cycle of maternal and child mortality and malnutrition. And when children receive adequate nutrition they reach their full potential.

Research shows that equalizing men's and women's status would reduce the number of

malnourished children by 13.4 million in South Asia and by 1.7 million in Sub-Saharan Africa. (IFPRI)

The irrefutable scientific evidence is now in that if a child *in utero* or under two does not have enough nutrition the damage is irreversible. It is nearly criminal for us not to act together to end the scourge of hunger, stunting and undernutrition.

A groundbreaking study was done in Guatemala that followed two groups of children. One group received nutrition support for under 2s and the other did not. As adults, the group that had the interventions had incomes 46 percent higher than those that did not. Now we know that the investment in undernutrition is absolutely critical.

A WFP study shows child undernutriton costs society up to 11 percent of GDP – billions lost each year. WFP is leading global efforts to develop ready-to-use-supplementary foods to prevent and treat moderate acute malnutrition. In Pakistan and India, for example, WFP is partnering with local industry and food technologists to develop a micronutrient-fortified paste based on chickpeas and dried milk.

A win-win solution, the paste is affordable, does not require water or refrigeration and is produced using local inputs from agricultural producers. The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and WFP are working with the Government of Egypt and the private sector to launch a nationwide project to

fortify wheat flour used in making baladi bread – the local staple food - and thereby to help protect 50 million Egyptians from anemia and other deficiencies. WFP has pioneered efforts with Guatemala.

3. Country-led Comprehensive Food Strategies. Finally, every nation needs a strategy to end hunger and malnutrition. Many countries are defeating hunger – from Ireland to Brazil, China, Vietnam, Malawi, Ghana, Rwanda, El Salvador. In every case progress started at the same point, a leader saying: “Not on my watch.” Food security must be a national priority, and women and girls have to be fully integrated into these strategies.

One leader who has made food security a priority is Liberian President Johnson Sirleaf. Let me share something she said about the role of women: "Ending hunger and improving the quality of life of women are inextricably linked, and leadership to end world hunger represents commitment to improving the quality of life of people who are poor and are more likely to be women."

I applaud the L’Áquila initiative and also the African Union, NEPAD and CAADP’s efforts that put national leadership and country ownership at the center. In Rome, FAO, IFAD and WFP are most effective when we work with country leaders to support the work nations do, connecting farmers to local food safety nets, scaling up nutrition interventions at health centers, purchasing locally

from small farmers.

Food security strategies work best when they link up all these elements. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, WFP has partnered with 10 women's centers and four local bakeries to prepare healthy pastries – date bars and high-energy biscuits – that we use in our school feeding programmes. The milk comes from local dairies, and all of the production is done locally. Over 130 women are employed through this program, which is a real win-win. The children get healthy meals and we help reinvigorate the local economy. Women are leading this effort, and are benefitting from it as well.

A key element of a country-led food security and nutrition strategies are safety nets such as school meals. Egypt and Brazil have successful programs that with the World Bank can serve as models for other nations. School meals provide both good nutrition and encourage children – particularly girls – to stay in school. Take-home rations are the best – and most cost-effective human rights program for girls that there is. This is critical, because of the 72 million primary school aged children who do not attend school worldwide, 57 percent are girls. In addition, girls are 4 percent less likely than boys to complete primary school.

In Laos, a school programme that provides take home rations of canned fish, rice, and iodized salt has increased girls enrollment in schools from 53

percent of girls in the community to 84 percent. In Pakistan, girls who attend at least 20 days of school a month receive oil to take home, leading to an increase in enrollment of 135 percent in five years.

It would take just $3.6 billion a year for the world to say that it will reach all 66 million hungry school age children around the world. I call on all of you to consider ways to include this vital safety net in your country-led food security strategies. I'm proud that President Kufuor is our global ambassador on this critical issue.

Women are an unstoppable force when empowered for good. As Mrs. Mubarak said, "The situation is morally unacceptable." That is why WFP has called on 700 million women who have enough food to contribute 1 Euro a week to the 700 million women who are hungry. This is part of our "Billion for a Billion" Citizens Action Campaign that we recently launched.

Thank you all for being here, and I look forward to today's panel discussion.

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