

Statement by Australia
CSD-16, Agriculture thematic discussion, 5 May 2008

Madam Chair

It is very timely for the Commission on Sustainable Development to be sharpening its focus on agriculture – the critical contributor to global poverty reduction and food security, since 75% of the world's poor people live in rural areas.

We are all struck today by how obvious this seems, but somehow this obvious truth has been obscured in past decades.

Progress has been made in agriculture and poverty reduction in the rural areas of some developing countries, of course, as the Secretary-General's Report points out. But today's food price crisis reminds us just how urgently we need to redouble our efforts.

Australia welcomes the establishment of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Global Food Crisis and the FAO's forthcoming Conference, as well as other targeted international initiatives. We also commend the World Bank for the high quality analysis in its latest World Development Report, which focuses on the linkages between agriculture and development.

Australia will contribute \$A30 million to the World Food Programme's emergency appeal and we are lifting enhancing our efforts to tackle the root causes of food insecurity in developing countries, including through increased development assistance targeted towards agricultural development. We are also working hard in relevant multilateral processes to contribute to efforts towards improving agricultural development in developing countries. Among the most important is the WTO's Doha Development Agenda, which we sincerely hope will be brought to a successful conclusion in coming weeks and months.

It is important not to draw false, short term, conclusions from today's food crisis. Rather, we must focus in a determined way on long-term solutions.

Agriculture remains the most distorted sector in world trade. Australia shares the conclusions reached by expert analysts, including some of today's panel members, that better functioning markets at local, national and global levels are a key part of the solution to food insecurity. Further market distortions, including agricultural export bans and taxes, are not.

Like other speakers today, Australia strongly supports the role of research, development and innovation and technology transfer in lifting agricultural productivity and enhancing the sustainability of agriculture.

Unusually for an OECD country, Australia relies heavily on agriculture for its export income (20% to 25%) - as a nation we have made very significant investments to tackle agricultural productivity and sustainability. We face serious challenges in land and water management, including due to the effects of climate change.

With these challenges in mind, we are working with developing country partners, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, to extend and share our experience of agriculture, climate change adaptation and natural resource management. For example, Australia (with the World Bank and EU) is supporting the Solomon Islands Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy to guide a range of programs for improving critical agricultural services and capacity-building. And we have recently launched a \$450,000 partnership with the Mekong River Commission to develop climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, with a focus on addressing threats to food security in the Mekong Basin, including Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

These challenges are real and urgent, but require long term, targeted and systematic efforts in the context of practical partnerships. Australia wants to work with others to make serious and practical progress to meet our shared goals.