

Opening Remarks

By

**H.E. Mr. Hailemariam Dessalegn,
Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**

At

The High-Level Meeting on New Unified Approaches to End Hunger

**30 June 2013
Addis Ababa**

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let me begin by extending to you all a warm and brotherly greetings of the Government and people of Ethiopia and welcome you to this timely and important high-level meeting.

As you all know, the problem of hunger has long remained a colossal challenge to humanity and its progress. The face of hunger and its malign effects have been adversely affecting the development gains of many poor countries, and at times, tested the effectiveness and efficiencies of our policies and strategies designed to fight hunger.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Hunger, as some argue, has nothing to do with general shortage of food but is linked to the poverty of specific groups of people. It can exist in a country when there is no decline in the availability of food. In other words, hunger and famine are complex phenomena that go beyond food self-sufficiency. Our collective efforts should therefore not only aim at eliminating hunger but also need to be wider in scope to address the root cause of poverty. I believe this very endeavor, coupled with efforts to achieve sustainable human development, is the only plausible and meaningful way to ultimately win the war over hunger. Countries which have embarked on this path have proved right to the rest of the world of the validity of this argument, and important lessons now can be drawn from their experiences. For our continent that has been ravaged by hunger and famine for years, these lessons are extremely crucial in achieving a long lasting victory over the war we have waged against these human adversaries. What is even more important to recognize is that we don't have to necessarily go far in search for these best experiences as some of these countries are found here in Africa.

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There is now an enormous window of opportunity for eradicating hunger in Africa. It is projected that, through our collaborative measures, we can stop the suffering of 23 percent of all undernourished Africans and 40 percent of stunted and malnourished Children under five years of age.

Such optimism, I firmly believe, stems from the fact that Africa's strong economic performance over the years has brought significant impact in changing the development landscape of the continent. Equally, there now exists strong political commitment by governments, which in conjunction with strong partnership, have begun to bear fruits in addressing the problem of hunger. This is the reason why FAO and Instituto Lula of Brazil have joined forces with the African Union to help eradicate hunger and undernourishment in Africa. Our deliberation here today is a testimony of keeping the momentum of this renewed commitment through enhanced partnership. In this partnership, we are confident that our continent will make a very critical stride towards achieving the objective of fighting hunger and attaining sustainable development.

Africa, Ladies and Gentlemen, cannot afford to lose this opportune moment to make hunger history. We were a continent once thought by many of full of misery and despair. But now, even in times when the global economy is in disarray, we no longer are seen as victims of its adverse effects but provider of solution to its long-run recovery. We must therefore enhance our efforts to sustain our development gains. We should enhance the development of our agricultural sector and achieve food security. We know that this can be achieved as 60 percent of the continent's arable land is still unutilized. I believe it is time that we move beyond subsistence agricultural production and embrace agro-industrialization to realize our dream of becoming the global growth pole in the twenty-first century. As recently as last May, this is what we the African Heads of State and Government in our 50th Anniversary solemn Declaration pledged to undertake. In fact to quote from our Declaration, we made a pledge to undertake measures to *"preserve our arable land for current and future generations, develop our rural economies, our agricultural production and agro-processing to eradicate hunger and malnutrition as well as achieve food security and self-sufficiency"*.

We, in Ethiopia, have already embarked on that path. Our Productive safety net Programmes over the last decade and a half have helped lift millions of Ethiopians out of the shackles of hunger and food insecurity. Our natural conservation efforts have proved their caliber not only in the rehabilitation of our eco-systems but also in creating yet more and more opportunities for our citizens to further enhance their food security. Similarly, our efforts to use our surface and underground water resources to this end are gathering momentum by the day and it is our firm belief that we can further strengthen the drought resilience of our people even better.

Currently, we are more than half way in implementing the Five-Year Growth and Transformation Plan which envisions transforming agriculture to show significant increase in productivity and exports and lay the foundation for industry to take the lead in the economy. We are beginning to witness the

realization of this transformation as our agricultural sector continues to grow exhibiting a 10 percent average growth rate over the past 10 years. Within the framework of our Agricultural Development Led-Industrialization Strategy, we have also initiated a five year Agricultural Development Programme with the objective of closing the country's food gap in the medium-term. In line with the development of our agricultural sector and cognizant of the level of vulnerability in the country, we, in close collaboration with our development partners, have developed the New Coalition for Food Security Programme, which has been under implementation since 2003 in 319 chronically food insecure districts. By the end of the next decade, we will have achieved many of the development goals we have set for ourselves.

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Despite the remarkable progress we have achieved over the years, it is our firm belief that much still remains to be done to fully and effectively address the challenges associated with food security and hunger. It has become now abundantly clear that unless the international community stands united to agree on a common roadmap to address the effects of climate change, Africa will continue to pay the price for something of not its own doing. This has once again been confirmed by the recently published report of the World Bank whose title reminded us to *Turn down the Heat*. We, therefore, need to act now and soon if we to sustain our development gains to make a dent not only in ending hunger but also in ensuring sustainable development in a comprehensive and holistic manner.

Our new and unified approach to end hunger in our continent must embrace this fundamental objective. Our tasks through this approach should aim at identifying best practices and experiences applicable to Africa, scaling up successful activities, filling gaps and, if necessary, adjusting and rethink our approach.

Now that we are approaching the 2015 deadline, our collective efforts to address poverty and hunger must be enhanced to achieve the goals and targets of the MDGs within the remaining time frame. In this context, I would like to commend the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post 2015

Development Agenda for their report in which their recommendation could not have been more apt and concise in bringing to the forefront the challenges we still face today, including poverty and hunger. We must build on these recommendations to chart the next development agenda that fully and effectively addresses our world's development challenges, particularly those related to hunger in Africa.

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I have therefore noted with a sense of satisfaction that this meeting will focus on substantive and detailed discussions on new and unified approach to end hunger in our continent. I believe I can count on your sense of duty towards Africa to close this meeting with recommendations that adequately address policy, practice and knowledge pertinent to our continent.

In conclusion, I would like to express our deep appreciation to the African Union Commission, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization and the Instituto Lula for taking the initiative to organize this high-level event and more importantly for selecting a theme which is a pressing issue for our continent.

I wish you all a productive deliberation and pleasant stay in Ethiopia.

With this brief remark, I declare this high-level meeting opened.

Thank you so much for your kind attention.