FAO HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON

WORLD FOOD SECURITY:
THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIOENERGY
ROME 3 – 5 JUNE, 2008

STATEMENT FROM DR. THE HON. DENZIL L. DOUGLAS,
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Distinguished Chairperson, Minister Amin Abaza, Presidents, Heads of Government, Director-General, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The Government of St. Kitts and Nevis is pleased to participate in this high level conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Food and Agriculture Organization and in particular the Director General, Dr. Jacques Diouf, for his kind invitation to participate in such an important meeting on world food security. The positive response from several Heads of State and Government as well as numerous Ministers of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, water, energy and environment who are participating in this meeting is a strong indication of the relevance and timeliness of this conference. The purpose of this high level conference to address food security issues that have been exacerbated by soaring food prices and the challenges of climate change and energy security is of critical importance to all of us and in particular the world's poor. The objective of this conference is to assist countries and the international community in devising sustainable solutions to the food crisis by identifying the policies, strategies and programmes required to safeguard world food security in the immediate, short and longer term is highly laudable.

Climate change affects all of us but small island developing states and the world's poor are particularly vulnerable to such changes. It can be expected that the hundreds of millions of small scale farmers, fishers and persons who depend on the forest and who are already vulnerable as well as food insecure will be the worst affected by changes in the climate. Such changes are expected to affect the suitability of land for the different types of crops, livestock and pasture development as well as the marine environment. It will also affect the health and productivity of forests, the incidence of pests and diseases as well as biodiversity and ecosystems. The effect of such changes is likely to be the loss of farm land due to increased aridity, ground water depletion, salinity and the rise in sea level. Many of the world's small scale farmers are the people who are most food insecure and are least equipped to adapt to climate change. These small scale farmers are therefore the most vulnerable to climate change phenomena such as more frequent and intense drought as well as hurricanes and cyclones. As you are aware, the livelihoods of persons on small island developing states will also be severely challenged by such changes.

There is no doubt that the escalating price of fossil fuel has impacted negatively on food security, while there is continued debate about the effects of bioenergy.

Bioenergy has been defined as energy produced from biomass such as energy crops, forestry residues and organic wastes. Currently much attention is being paid to the production of liquid biofuels, mainly ethanol and biodiesel. The biofuels are mainly produced from food crops and are used for transport. Ethanol is mainly produced from sugarcane and maize while the production of biodiesel is from rapeseed but also palm oil and soyabean oil. The growing biofuel market is driving up commodity and food prices and represents a new source of demand for agricultural commodities. This growth can provide new economic opportunities for the many millions of people who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. On the other hand, the soaring food prices are bad news for poor consumers and are dramatically worsening their living conditions. We now have a situation in many parts of the world where food and energy crops are competing for land, water and other resources. As policy makers, we have the difficult task of

determining how best to respond to the new opportunities while ensuring that our people can grow and buy adequate food.

There is clearly a strong need to better understand the nexus between food security, climate change and bioenergy. It is important to note that the degree to which the rapid rise in demand for biofuel feedstocks has contributed to the current rise in food prices varies across countries and that the impact on livelihood is also variable. However, poor countries that are both food and energy importers are facing tremendous balance of payment pressures that can result in an erosion of economic and social gains. The four dimensions of food security which are availability, access, stability and utilization can also be expected to be affected in varying ways. The diversion of land, water and other productive resources from food to biofuel production can threaten the availability of food on both the national and international level. Higher food prices can further erode the ability of poor persons to access food due to their low income levels. However farmers who are net producers can benefit from higher prices and investments in bioenergy growth can revitalize agriculture and provide employment opportunities. Food security can therefore be expected to improve for some persons while others are experiencing deterioration. A challenge for us is therefore to develop and agree on steps that would have to be taken towards developing sustainable bioenergy policies and programmes taking into account food security and rural development.

The dramatic increases in food prices within recent months are worsening the living conditions of millions of poor people many of whom live on less than a dollar a day. Poor people generally spend more than half of their income on food and the rapid increases in food prices that we are currently experiencing make their ability to consume nutritious foods even more challenging. We have seen that in January 2008 the FAO Food Price Index jumped by 47% from the previous year which included increases in cereals by 62%, dairy by 69% and vegetable oils by 85%. We have also seen that the prices of staple foods such as maize, wheat, rice and beans have in some cases risen by more than 100 percent. Not only have world food prices risen sharply but there have also been serious shortages of rice, wheat and maize. This has created the worst food crisis in recent years

for the entire world including Latin America and the Caribbean. The current high food prices makes it even more challenging for us to achieve the first of the Millennium Development Goals which is to reduce by half extreme poverty and hunger in the world by 2015.

In the Caribbean the current food crisis has resulted in dramatic food price increases as well as shortages of staples. This has resulted in food riots and even deaths (Haiti) and has threatened the survival of food insecure people and vulnerable communities. The Caribbean, though a significant producer, is a net importer of food. In many ways this has been influenced by our eating habits that have moved away from the consumption of local to imported foods. There is therefore an urgent need for product transformation of locally grown foods into forms that are more easily acceptable by our people. Simultaneously there is also a need to adjust our eating habits and consume more locally grown food.

The development of bioenergy and other alternative forms are of critical importance to St. Kitts and Nevis. As a result we have developed an energy strategy that is intended to help promote and contribute to the sustainable development of the country. Consequently we are seeking to develop indigenous sources and fuel substitution in the generation of electricity and transportation fuels. The use of biomass for energy generation is one area that is under active consideration. However our aim is to ensure that such biomass use is sustainable and does not adversely effect domestic food production. In pursuant of this aim we have recently given approval in principle for a biomass (cane grass) project as well as the establishment of a wind farm. Much attention is currently being paid on the development of a geothermal project for electricity generation while the use of solar energy is also under active consideration.

We urgently need to develop measures to ensure that the adverse effects of the higher food prices on the poor are minimized and that sustainable measures are developed and implemented to reduce poverty. As policy makers we have a critical role in ensuring that bioenergy is developed in a sustainable manner thereby safeguarding food security and

ensuring that the benefits reach the poor and those who are food insecure. Policy priorities would include safety nets to mitigate impacts of higher food prices on the poor and food insecure and the promotion of bioenergy policies that are environmentally sustainable and would foster market opportunities for small holders and other vulnerable groups. Climate change is expected to impose new challenges to arable land areas, livestock rearing and fisheries. We therefore need to agree on the actions that are necessary to achieve climate-responsive food security policies and programmes. There is need for greater investment in agriculture and rural development so that the world's poor can develop their potential to improve their nutrition and incomes.

I hope that this Summit on World Food Security would be able to effectively address the many food security issues that have arisen as a result of soaring food prices and food shortages as well as the several new challenges of climate change and energy security.

The high cost of oil prices has certainly affected food prices and calls for special and differential measures for the small island states of the Caribbean. It is therefore proposed that:

1. the protocol with the World Trade Organization (WTO) be suspended to allow Member Countries to produce more local agricultural products.

2. the FAO assist Member Countries with seeds, fertilizer and other inputs to assist the farmers to carry out a rapid production of agricultural products.

We need help and we need it immediately.

Thank you.