

MAURITIUS

*Statement to be delivered by H.E. Mr. Chasteau de Balyon at the
High-Level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of
Climate Change and Bioenergy, Rome, 3-5 June 2008*

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
The Secretary General,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Government of Mauritius, let me first of all thank the Secretary General for convening on a note of extreme urgency this High-Level Meeting to address the acute food crisis affecting the lives of millions of people all around the globe. It is a warning that immediate action is now required by the International Community. Lack of food security is a major cause of poverty and an obstacle to development which may lead to serious upheavals around the planet.

Food Security is a cause of global concern since the problem is now compounded by natural phenomenas linked to climate change and catastrophies such as floods and droughts, and economic factors relating to the rising cost of oil and diversion of food crops into biofuels as well as an increased demand for food from emerging countries. The price of wheat for example has more than doubled within a period of one year. Many countries which have seen an astronomical rise in their food bills, can no longer afford to buy the required basic food commodities for their population and may face social unrest. This untenable situation cannot continue and Mauritius is therefore calling the International Community to address this problem without delay.

Owing to its small size and absence of economies of scale Mauritius is a Net Food Importing Country. It faces sharp increases in food prices and the risk of periodic scarcity for some essential commodities. Food production on the island is limited by land availability, a high density population and climatic factors. Mauritius therefore does not have the physical resources to increase substantially its food security level particularly as the cane Industry in Mauritius remains a major pillar of the economy and foreign currency earner. Traditionally, the import of basic food commodities has been a heavy burden on the balance of payment.

On the other hand, being a Small Island Developing State, Mauritius faces increasing threats from climate change and natural disasters. These threats therefore have adverse economic implications for economic sectors such as tourism and agriculture.

To address the food security issue, the Government of Mauritius has elaborated an action plan to reduce our dependence on food import. This plan promotes access to agricultural land, agri-business, good agricultural practice as well as fisheries development, improvement of food quality and safety, reduces dependency on import and encourages promotion of export and food security.

Mauritius has also developed a seafood hub in order to maximize benefits from the fishing activities and landings of tuna fleet operating in the region. The Government of Mauritius has devised other policy measures to encourage artisan fishermen to fish off lagoon and for entrepreneurs to invest in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Excellencies,

Furthermore, I would like to emphasize that several initiatives are ongoing at the regional level to address the food security issue. Mauritius is envisaging to promote Cross-Border Investment Initiatives in the African region and these will allow local entrepreneurs to invest in neighbouring countries. Appropriate financing schemes would have to be

worked out with the help of donor agencies and technical assistance from international organizations to fund private sector initiatives to invest in these regions. This initiative may assist Mauritius, in its effort, to ensure food supply in the long run.

At the global level, Climate Change presents serious challenges to World Food Security. Its pervasive effect can be seen through altered rainfall patterns such as drought, floods which may lead to loss of biodiversity and mass movement of people and animals. Even in the fisheries sector, climate change has affected the productivity of fish as a result of increased water temperature and migration of fish species. In Mauritius, tuna catch has dropped in 2007 due to higher seawater temperatures and the movement of tuna outside the Exclusive Economic Zone.

Bioenergy has also been advocated as one of the strategies to fight against the effects of Climate Change but it also represents a serious threat to the food security of the poorest nations around the world. All member countries should therefore try to strike the right balance in their approach to address the problem of climate change and their fight against poverty in order to ensure World Food Security.

I thank you for your attention.