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**Statement by Mr. Ján Kubiš**
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**Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

The concept of food security has evolved significantly over time. The most well-known definition of food security, which has been formally adopted at the global level, comes from the 1996 World Food Summit:

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

Food security is a complex multi-dimensional problem: agricultural production, trade, transportation and storage, income, food quality, clean water, sanitation, governance and political stability are all factors that have an influence on it. Depending on our professional background and the context we work in, our opinions on action needed to achieve food security will most likely differ.

When speaking about the UN role in food security, notably in the current period, I would like first of all to note the efforts of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. In 2008 he established a High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis that in its Comprehensive Framework for Action proposed a twin-track response to the still ongoing Food Crisis.

A. To meet the immediate needs of vulnerable populations, the CFA proposes four key outcomes to be advanced through a menu of different actions: 1) emergency food assistance, nutrition interventions and safety nets to be enhanced and made more accessible; 2) smallholder farmer food production to be boosted; 3) trade and tax policies to be adjusted; and 4) macroeconomic implications to be managed. Each outcome has a menu of actions from which to choose.

B. To build resilience and contribute to global food and nutrition security in the longer-term, four additional critical outcomes are put forward: 1) social protection systems to be expanded; 2) smallholder farmer-led food availability growth to be sustained; 3) international food markets to be improved; and 4) international biofuel consensus to be developed.

In January 2009, a high level meeting on Food Security was held in Madrid where a Global Partnership for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition was established. From a DFID press release of March: "The partnership will work with developing countries to support poor farmers using 'food and agriculture strategies' including welfare schemes that safeguard citizens, including supplying food or cash to buy their own produce. The partnership will also help facilitate new research and analysis into potential barriers to food production and transport such as biofuels, trade restrictions and climate change."

As almost everything in aid sector, also this move has met with criticism. For some civil society representatives the Global Partnership's sin is that it is mainly pushed by the G8 countries and will give too much influence to multilateral institutions like the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, but also to major transnational corporations (TNCs) and the big foundations. The fear was also that the FAO and other UN agencies based in Rome, despite their mandate and expertise to implement effective programmes could be sidelined.

The challenges of food security continue to be immense and they are exacerbated by the financial and economic crisis, coupled with the still increased prices of staple grain. Although prices have gone down in comparison with the peak in 2008, rice is still nearly one and a half times as it was at the beginning of 2008 and one cannot fail to register a steady rise in the price of sugar over the past months.

International grain prices remain high also compared to their historical averages:
- rice in March 2009 was 49% above its ten-year average;
- maize in April 2009 was 43% above its ten-year average;
- soybean in March 2009 was 36% above its ten-year average;
- wheat in April 2009 was 31% above its ten-year average.

This situation unfortunately affects a good number of UNECE countries, although in many different ways. For example in the FAO 2009 Crop Prospects and Food Situation, Tajikistan is listed among Low-Income, Food-Deficit Countries (LIFDC) with a deteriorating situation caused by drought, locusts and, more recently, in May 2009, flooding. In December 2008, the World Food

Programme assessed one in five Kyrgyz households as being "severely food insecure". Finally, as stated at the 2009 OECD and FAO Conference on Food Security in Paris Russia has the largest absolute food trade deficit of all the countries in the report (including China).

Some argue that the best way for net food importing countries to ensure the cheapest and highest availability of food, would be to participate in a completely free trade environment. It is true that good results are achieved like this in cities.

There is nevertheless a question about whether this gives the best result also for rural areas where alternative employment is not available and people depend upon farming for subsistence as well as income (and prices that are too low can prevent them from having even the funds to buy seed for their subsistence).

In times of dramatic increases in prices for basic food like in 2008, that approach also results in exporters imposing export bans to control domestic prices leading to dramatic food shortages. Something similar happened in Kyrgyzstan which was negatively affected by wheat export controls in Kazakhstan and Ukraine.

Others see food aid more as free market distortion. Many criticize notably bringing in external supplies as free food. Such aid is indeed more easily funded because some countries have only supplied food aid in the form of national food surplus versus buying from local suppliers and preserving their markets/income. Such approach while helping to cover the basic needs, does not stimulate local production and distribution capacity, is prone to waste, deepens long-term dependency and does not sufficiently encourage good governance. Subsequently, such well-motivated aid that in its turn means lack of support for local small farmers frequently turns detrimental to the fate of this segment of the population and sustainable food security as such.

After these more general remarks I would like to speak about what my organization, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, does to improve global food security.

The UNECE is one of the UN’s five regional economic commissions. Our membership includes 56 States from Europe and Central Asia, as well as United States, Canada and the State of Israel. The mandate of UNECE covers a broad range of issues such as the development of transportation links, trade facilitation, sustainable development of water and energy resources, land management, economic competitiveness and innovative development. At the UNECE we contribute to world food security in a rather specialized and technical way. We do not buy and ship food to populations affected by hunger. We promote economic and environmental conditions along with development of policies, standards and regulations that enhance food security in the region.

Thus, much of UNECE’s work directly and indirectly contributes to food security. Allow me today to focus on three areas: (1) trade facilitation, (2) agricultural quality standards and (3) sustainable water management, particularly in Central Asia.

**Trade facilitation**

You may ask how our work in trade facilitation supports food security. Let me illustrate this by a very concrete example - the findings of a study conducted by SITPRO, a UK-based trade facilitation agency. This study revealed that in the UK, there were as many as 1.4 million incidences of missing or delayed documentation in the perishable food supply chain in 2005, this being an average of 36 missing or delayed documents per month per importer. This same report also estimates that perishable produce losses due to spoilage in the UK, much of which is related to delays, are between 5 and 50%, depending upon the type of produce. When added to other delays caused by procedures the result is lower quality and quantity as well as higher costs.

Trade facilitation, which is the simplification, harmonization, and where possible, the elimination of procedures, can reduce the time, and money required for these border processes and thus can significantly reduce the waste caused by delays in the import and export of agricultural goods.

Based upon investigations in countries that have adopted e-documentation procedures, which is one of the trade facilitation goals my organization is working towards, this same SITPRO report shows that the UK perishable food supply chain could save £2.6 billion each year in costs based upon 2005 trade figures, including significant reductions to waste in terms of meat, grain, flowers, fruit, and vegetables that never make it across the border due to spoilage. These are important savings for the UK, but for other medium and low-income countries, savings such as these may be critical to ensuring an adequate and affordable food supply for their populations.

**Agricultural quality standards**

The UNECE produces regulations and standards that support the production of agricultural

produce, together with its efficient transportation and trade. This helps countries ensure that their production of quality produce is sustainable. We also provide countries with technical assistance for developing the legal and technical infrastructure they need for growing high-quality agricultural products both for domestic consumption and for international trade.

How do our standards contribute to food security?

Let me give you some examples. In Russia people say: “Картошка - второй хлеб” (“Potato is second bread”). The potato is a strategically important crop not only in the Russian Federation but in many countries throughout the world. UNECE has developed an international Standard for Seed Potatoes, which sets a unique international frame of reference for growing and trading in high-quality seed potatoes. By applying this Standard growers can considerably increase their potato yields, even in African countries with very hot climates. This helps feed the growing populations and increases the resilience of present food production systems to challenges posed by climate change.

Most of the world trade in fresh fruit and vegetables is carried out on the basis of our standards. The standards are in fact a common trading language for businesses and if they are applied multilaterally, trade barriers disappear. This gives farmers, particularly in developing countries, new opportunities to sell their products on world markets, as well as increase their production and productivity. Increased trade volumes lead to increased food supply on the markets and reduce the volatility of international prices for agricultural commodities.

UNECE standards promote higher consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. Food security had been traditionally perceived as consuming sufficient protein and energy, that is “food quantity”. The importance of micro-nutrients that fruits and vegetables are particularly rich in, for a balanced and nutritious diet (food quality) is now well recognized.

UNECE standards protect all of us, as consumers. They define minimum commercial quality, and therefore keep poor quality produce out of the market.

Who draws up the standards?

All the member States of the United Nations are entitled to participate in our agricultural standards work. Non-governmental organizations and the private sector also actively participate. UNECE standards have served as a basis for many European Union, Codex Alimentarius and OECD standards.

The standards are cost free. You can download them from our website at: www.unece.org/trade .

**Sustainable water management in Central Asia**

Now, let me turn to the third area of activities linked to food security.

As the “Central Asian Regional Risk Assessment” prepared by the UNDP points out, the poorest countries of Central Asia are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. During the compound “water, energy and food” crisis of 2007-2008 exceptionally cold weather combined with a serious drought damaged crops and reduced livestock herds in Tajikistan. Similar problems were experienced – though on a somewhat lesser scale – in the Kyrgyz Republic. Higher global food prices exacerbated food insecurity in both countries.

The UNECE, within the coordination framework established by the UNDP, has been working closely with other UN agencies, international and regional organizations and international financial institutions to reduce food insecurity in the less developed countries of Central Asia.

While humanitarian agencies are focusing on short-term measures and better preparedness of the international community for an eventual repetition of the compound crisis, the UNECE works with the countries of the region on developing long-term solutions for improved food security.

We are fully aware of the complexity and urgency of this task. In Central Asia extreme weather conditions have repeatedly forced upstream countries to use more water for power generation than usual, thus reducing the amount of water available for irrigation in the growing period. Climate change might decrease water availability in Central Asia much faster than expected, thus further increasing food insecurity. It is already causing irregular weather, including long dry periods.

Piecemeal solutions, confined to individual sectors and countries, in most cases are likely to fail to

bridge the growing gap between the needs of rapidly growing populations and local food production, seriously limited by the continuing decrease in the quality and quantity of available water and extensive soil degradation.

The rational and sustainable management of water resources would require a fundamental change of present approaches, when upstream and downstream countries look at regional water release and water use regimes as a zero sum game. The UNECE, working with relevant regional organizations, like the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea and the Inter-State Commission on Sustainable Development as well as the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy is promoting the development of comprehensive regional solutions.

Strengthened regional cooperation would open up opportunities to add value and share benefits in the energy, agriculture and water sectors in Central Asia. Long-term agreements on optimal water-release regimes combined with obligations to improve the efficiency of water-use, as well as the development of cross-border and regional markets for food products would facilitate a gradual shift towards an optimal distribution of crops at the regional level and increase the resilience of the agriculture of Central Asian countries to more frequent dry periods caused by climate change.

Central Asian countries need comprehensive and long-term capacity building programmes to successfully implement this fundamental policy shift. The UNECE, using its in-house expertise and its relevant international legal instruments and norms is committed to increase technical assistance to Central Asia in a number of relevant fields, including water resources management, environmental protection, energy efficiency, trade and transport.

The UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia – jointly supported by the UNECE and UNESCAP – offers a neutral UN umbrella for high-level strategic discussions on complex regional issues, including those related to food security as well as a framework for a range of relevant cross-sector projects. I would like to use this opportunity to thank the Government of the Russian Federation for its active political and financial support to UNECE activities within SPECA.

In addition, at present UNECE, in the framework of a three-year programme funded by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, provides increased technical assistance to the strengthening of regional institutions, modernization of legal frameworks and the development of comprehensive, transparent and easily accessible databases to facilitate evidence-based decision-making.

Well-functioning regional institutions, modern, legally binding and enforceable agreements and reliable and easily accessible data would facilitate the development of complex regional solutions, stretching over several sectors which in turn would contribute to enhanced food production, better opportunities for trade in agricultural products, and, as a result, enhanced regional food security.

I hope that the above examples help to illustrate the complex underpinnings of food aid and security.

Thank you for your attention.

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