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The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is this week highlighting the International Year of the Potato and, in so doing, aims to draw attention to some of the most urgent challenges facing the international community – the global food crisis and the need to step up efforts to realize the Millennium Development Goals.

One of the essential roles of the UNECE is to promote international trade in order not only to improve our standard of living, but also to promote stability and peace in this region. To facilitate exchanges and to protect consumers, the UNECE has developed a series of norms and standards in particular for transport and trade, but also for agricultural products.

At the beginning of the 1950s the member States of the UNECE asked the Commission to establish quality standards for agricultural products which were exchanged throughout the region. These standards deal with fresh fruit and vegetables, dry and dried products, seed potatoes, early and ware potatoes, meat, cut flowers and eggs exported or imported by the 56 member countries of UNECE. These standards help in facilitating international trade; they also encourage the production of quality goods, improve the profitability of producers and protect consumers' interests.

Among these standards, those on potatoes are of special importance this year since the United Nations General Assembly at its Sixtieth Session declared 2008 to be the International Year of the Potato. It has affirmed "the need to focus world attention on the role that the potato can play in providing food security and eradicating poverty in support of achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals" and has invited all relevant organizations of the United Nations system to actively participate in this celebration.

UNECE is organizing an exhibition in the United Nations Cafeteria, from 3-7 November, to mark both the International Year of the Potato 2008 and the launch of the UNECE Potato Cookbook "The Potato: Around the world in 200 recipes" in English and French. The exhibition and Cookbook are intended to highlight the work of the United Nations in focusing world attention on the importance of the potato in providing food security and alleviating poverty. Cultivation of potatoes is very much part of the comprehensive efforts being undertaken to achieve greater food security through productivity gains. As the world's number one non-grain commodity, sustainable potato-based systems enhance the well-being of both producers and consumers.

A Press Conference will take place at 10.30 a.m. on Thursday 6 November in Salle III with the following speakers:

Mr. Paolo GARONNA, Officer in Charge, UNECE
Mr. Serguei MALANITCHEV Chief, Agricultural Quality Standards Section, UNECE Trade and Timber Division

A copy of the UNECE Cookbook in English and French will be available for all journalists at the Press Conference.

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