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## Press Release

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#### **UN BODIES CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION TO ENSURE ACHIEVEMENT**

#### **OF GOALS SET OUT IN MILLENNIUM SUMMIT**

#### **In Joint Statement, Agency Heads Welcome Millennium Project Report**

(Reissued as received.)

ROME, 18 January (IFAD) -- Three Rome-based UN agencies today called for immediate action by developed and developing countries to ensure that the goals of the 2000 Millennium Summit are achieved.

"Leaders and other stakeholders in the poorest countries must take the necessary steps to ensure good governance and sound economic planning. It falls on the international community to take swift, strategic action to support them", they declared.

The joint statement by Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), James Morris, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), and Lennart Bage, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), was issued at the Rome launch of the Millennium Project Report.

#### Eight Goals

The Report covers all eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the first of which includes a pledge to reduce by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. This Goal is in line with the target proclaimed at the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome.

"In a world that has abundant resources and can produce sufficient food to feed everybody, the extent of hunger is not only a moral outrage, but a manifestation of the world community's collective failure to put in place policies and programmes with long-term vision", the statement said.

"We believe that there is no choice but to meet the goals. The cost of not taking urgent action -- in terms of lives ruined, economic growth foregone, and natural resources irretrievably depleted -- is simply too high. More than 1.2 billion people still live in extreme poverty today: one in every five of the world's citizens.

Over 850 million people in the world are chronically hungry -- a number that is now on the rise after a decade of improvement. More than 5 million children die of causes directly related to malnutrition every year."

The agency heads noted that three quarters of those living in extreme poverty, about 900 million people, live in rural areas and depend on agriculture and related activities for their livelihoods.

#### ODA Has Fallen Steadily since 1988

"Yet, despite this, the share of public expenditure for agriculture and rural development is far from being commensurate with its importance in the economies of many developing countries, and official development assistance (ODA) for agriculture and the rural sector has fallen steadily since 1988. Today, only about 8 per cent of bilateral ODA goes to rural development", they said

"The same can be said of the lack of adequate investments in health and nutrition, income growth among the very poor and appropriate safety nets to protect people (and productive economic investments) against the shocks of drought, flood and famine", the statement continued.

It said insufficient attention was paid to the needs of farmers with small landholdings, especially women farmers who make up the majority of these. "They support the poorest and hungriest, yet are often

denied access to resources such as land, water, credit and markets."

Farmers in poor developing countries also had difficulty being competitive in selling their produce when markets were flooded by cheap produce from subsidized producers in wealthier countries.

#### A Twin-track Strategy

The three agencies advocated a twin-track strategy to combat hunger and poverty: "On the one hand, seeking to create a vibrant economy where people can provide for themselves, they must have the building blocks for long-term sustainable growth, including improved infrastructure, sound natural resource management and increased access to jobs, education, land, water, credit, social services and organizations for the poor. This means investments in increasing productivity, in rural financial and service institutions and in markets, backed by major policy reforms."

"On the other hand, direct, sustained, and well-targeted assistance is often necessary to put food into hungry mouths today, to prevent disease, send children to school, rebuild infrastructure shattered by armed conflicts, and reclaim natural resources eroded by generations of over-use."

The statement noted that only a small fraction of ODA goes to direct food and nutrition support, an amount insufficient for the necessary targeted interventions in rural areas, which can save lives and build livelihoods.

The three agency heads expressed their concern at the finding of the Report that many countries, the majority of them in sub-Saharan Africa, were falling behind in attempts to achieve the MDGs.

But they declared: "Nevertheless, the three Rome-based agencies reconfirm that the MDGs can be realised by 2015, if both the developing and developed world take immediate action."

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