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Statement by Mr. Jean Ziegler

Special Rapporteur on the right to food

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY**ORAL STATEMENT OF MR. JEAN ZIEGLER,
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD****25 October 2006**

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to present today my sixth report as Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/165.

I have to report to you today that, despite promises to eradicate hunger, there has been little progress in reducing the global number of victims of hunger. Today, the number of people suffering from hunger has increased to 852 million people. Every five seconds, a child dies from hunger and malnutrition-related diseases. Global hunger has been on the rise since 1996, despite promises at the World Food Summit and in the Millennium Development Goals. It is a shame on humanity, that in a world that is richer than ever before, 6 million should children die of malnutrition and related illnesses before they reach the age of five. Yet, according to the FAO, our planet already produces enough food to feed every child, woman and man. It could produce enough food to feed 12 billion people, double the world population of 6 billion people.

Hunger and famine are thus not inevitable. They are a violation of human rights. All human beings have the right to live in dignity, free from hunger. The right to food is a human right.

And yet, as we speak, food crises across Africa continue to take a heavy toll. The effects of conflict in Sudan, in Lebanon, in the Palestinian territories, Sri Lanka are having severe impacts on the right to food and the livelihoods of thousands of people. The situation of the right to food remains precarious in Myanmar and in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as numerous other countries

Despite the universal recognition that freedom from hunger is a human right, hunger persists across the world. The majority of the hungry live in Asia and Africa. Most of them

live in rural areas. In fact, approximately 80% of the hungry live in rural areas and depend on agriculture and pastoralism to survive. They are hungry because they do not have enough work, or access to productive resources, like land and water to feed their families. More than 65% of the hungry live on small plots of land and produce crops for their own subsistence and for sale on local markets. Many live in remote or marginal lands that are vulnerable to drought and natural disasters. Good, fertile lands tend to be concentrated in the hands of wealthier landowners – for example, in Guatemala, the Special Rapporteur saw that most of the fertile lands of central Guatemala are held in huge plantations while the majority of indigenous people have to cultivate the steep slopes of Guatemala's mountainous regions. Another 20% of the hungry are landless labourers dependent on agricultural labour, but paid pitiful wages, insufficient to feed their families. With the situation deteriorating in rural areas, migrants are moving to urban slums and urban hunger is rising fast. About 20% of the hungry now live in urban areas, yet many are unable to find livelihoods that can feed their families.

Small farmers face hunger as a result of the effects of macroeconomic and international trade policies on local markets. At the time of writing my report, the collapse of the World Trade Organisation's Doha Development Round was in the headlines. The so-called "Development Round" of trade talks collapsed because the most developed countries, particularly the EU and the US, have not lived up to their promises to promote development through trade. Developed countries have refused to liberalize their own agriculture (even while preaching free trade and unilateral liberalization to poor countries), without regard to the impacts on development and food security in the least developed countries. No deal was reached on export subsidies. This means that dumping will continue. Dumping of agricultural products, sold at below-cost-of-production prices, in developing country markets will continue to hurt the livelihoods of millions of small farmers in the least developed countries. In Africa or Latin America for example, it is possible for shops and supermarkets to buy subsidised maize or vegetables from Europe or the US at a price that is lower than local produce. Millions of African or Latin American peasants, who toil with their families more than 15 hours per day, have no markets to sell their crops and cannot earn enough to feed their families. Hunger is therefore a global responsibility.

Hunger is also related to the global effects of climate change, desertification and land degradation. Given that the General Assembly declared 2006 to be the "Year of Deserts and Desertification", I decided to devote one section of my report on the impact of drought,

desertification and land degradation on the right to food, particularly in Africa. Without adequate investment in small scale irrigation and small scale agriculture, there is little hope of eradicating hunger. Where the land becomes as hard as concrete and the wells dry up, thousands of families are being forced every year to leave their villages and migrate to city slums.

In my recommendations, I urge all governments to respond in the short-term to urgent appeals in relation to food crises. As I conclude that hunger is still primarily a rural problem, in the long-term I also strongly encourage that massive investment be directed towards rural development and small-scale agriculture and pastoralism to fight food insecurity. In addition, I believe that fighting hunger must include fighting desertification and land degradation, through investments and public policies appropriate to the specific risks of drylands. To this end I urge all states parties to implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, as part of the effort to fight hunger. I also urge all Governments to implement their commitment to the right to freedom from hunger, as required under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I also wish to report that in the past year I conducted three country missions. In February 2005 I visited Guatemala. With a long history of inequality, social exclusion and discrimination against the indigenous population, this country is still working to overcome the malnutrition amongst its children, especially indigenous children. Impressive measures have been taken by the current Government to combat malnutrition amongst its population and in particular its children. Efforts are still needed to resolve the agrarian conflict and inequalities in access to productive resources particularly for the indigenous peoples, as well as strengthening equal protection before the law to ensure access to justice for the right to food in Guatemala.

In August 2005 I visited India and found that with such an immense population of more than 1 billion people, the country is doing an impressive work to overcome hunger and extreme poverty. The Government has conquered the threats of large-scale famine that plagued its history. It runs the largest Public Food Distribution System in the world that reaches into every village in India. It is challenging discrimination through its Supreme

Court, which has also made groundbreaking legal decisions related to the right to food. Freedom from hunger is understood as a human right. However continuing efforts will still be needed to fight discrimination and ensure access to justice to protect the right to food for all people in India.

In September 2006 upon the invitation of the Government, I visited Lebanon following the war between Hezbollah and Israel that took place from 12 July to 14 August. I also requested authorization to visit Israel to investigate the situation of the right to food of the affected Israeli population, but I received no response from the Government of Israel. The war, which, according to the Government of Lebanon, resulted in 1,189 killed (mostly civilians), 4,399 injured, 974,189 displaced and between 15,000 and 30,000 homes destroyed, took place at the peak of the fishing and fruit harvest season, affecting the people who earn their livelihoods from these sectors both directly in terms of damage but even more importantly indirectly in terms of lost markets and revenues. Much farmland has been affected by bombing and will continue to be affected by hundreds of thousands of unexploded bombs that are continuing to make access to many fields impossible. The destruction by the Israeli forces of infrastructure essential to the survival of the population, particularly agricultural, irrigation and water infrastructure will also have long term impacts on livelihoods and access to food and water. Fishing has been heavily affected and the coastal ecosystem almost totally destroyed by the massive oil spill due to Israeli bombing of the Jiyeh fuel tanks on 14 July 2006. I found that the livelihoods of a large part of the population have been disrupted by the war, and the process of reconstructing livelihoods has been slow. Loss of livelihoods and sources of income is the main threat for the future wellbeing of many thousands of families, particularly in rural areas. I have therefore recommended that the Government of Israel be held responsible under international law for any violation of the right to food of the Lebanese civilian population and comply with its obligation to ensure that all victims of violations of the right to food receive adequate reparation and compensation for the losses suffered during the war as well as for ongoing losses due to the disruption of livelihoods.

All human beings have a right to live in dignity, free from hunger and starvation.

Thank you.