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Meeting of the Food Aid Committee, London, 5 June 2009

The Food Aid Committee held its 100th Session on 5 June 2009 under the chairmanship of Mr Hiroshi Oka, Minister (Economic Affairs), Embassy of Japan. It reviewed the global food situation and current food emergencies, also receiving a report from the observer from the World Food Programme. In addition to substantial operations in east Africa, notably in Sudan and Ethiopia, there were recent emergency appeals for people displaced in fighting in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Donors exchanged information on national food aid and related policy developments as well as on long-term food security concerns.

The observer from the WTO updated members on the latest situation regarding the Doha negotiations, including the draft modalities in agriculture. Members agreed that until there was a final outcome to these negotiations, which included general disciplines applicable to food aid transactions, it would not be possible to begin a formal renegotiation of the Food Aid Convention, 1999 (FAC). However, during recent informal meetings members of the Food Aid Committee discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the current Convention, including the operation of the Food Aid Committee, and proposals for the possible guiding objective of a new convention. Good progress was made and several issues were identified for further examination, also with the aim to engage with other stakeholders before any renegotiation of the FAC takes place. Meanwhile, the 1999 Convention, due to expire on 30 June 2009, was extended by one year, to June 2010.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the Convention, the Committee agreed to amend the relevant Rule in the FAC Rules of Procedure to further facilitate the provision of micronutrients in emergency or other food aid situations where there is food aid provided and there are known micronutrient deficiencies or there is documented malnutrition.

Having examined a report on the fulfilment of their 2007/08 obligations, members shared information on estimated food aid operations in 2008/09. These were forecast to reach around 6.6m. tons (wheat equivalent), therefore exceeding members' combined minimum obligations. However, in view of the increased complexity of food aid operations, often involving local purchases and triangular transactions, only limited data were available at this stage and the Secretariat's estimate is only preliminary.

The Committee elected Ms Sharon Murphy, Deputy Head of the Economic and Planning Division, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Ireland, as Chair for 2009/10. Ms Leslie Norton, Director General, International Humanitarian Assistance Directorate, CIDA, Canada, was appointed as Vice-Chair. The Committee thanked Mr Oka for his excellent leadership of the Committee during the past year.

On the occasion of the Committee's 100th Session since it first met in October 1968, the Secretariat launched a new FAC website giving ready access to all reports published during the past decade, including full details of members' operations. Please see www.foodaidconvention.org

Note for editors: Under the Food Aid Convention, 1999, donors pledge to provide annually specified minimum amounts or values of food aid to developing countries in the form of grains and other food products. The objective of the Convention is to contribute to world food security and to improve the ability of the international community to respond to emergency food situations and other food needs of developing countries, ensuring that food aid is directed to the alleviation of poverty and hunger of the most vulnerable groups.

The Food Aid Convention is administered by the International Grains Council (IGC), whose Secretariat services the Food Aid Committee. For more background information on the role and activities of the Food Aid Committee and full details of FAC operations in recent years, please see the FAC website at www.foodaidconvention.org, or contact the IGC Secretariat.

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