

**SESSION I: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

October 13, 2005 - 8:45 a.m. - Noon  
International Experts - Hunger and Nutrition

**HON. ABDOULAYE DIOP**

Ambassador of Mali to the United States

Your Excellencies, Honorable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

My colleagues and I are here to draw attention to the persistent problem of hunger and malnutrition in Africa, and to encourage the world community, including governments, private sector and civil society, to work with us and seek sustainable improvement to food and nutrition security in our continent. While the theme of this symposium is on the dual challenge of malnutrition and obesity, the former is our principal problem.

According to the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization and the Hunger Task Force reports, Africa is the only region in the world where hunger and malnutrition are projected to increase over the next two decades unless major new investments are made. One third of the region's 700 million people are undernourished and one half lives on less than \$1 a day. With three-quarters of the population living in rural areas and depending on agriculture for their livelihood, we strongly believe that the most viable means of improving their welfare and easing malnutrition, hunger and poverty is through sustained agricultural growth and rural-based economic development.

Today, Africa faces similar challenges like Asia did in the 1960s, with high population growth and diminishing agricultural productivity. The solutions then included significant investment in science and technology, sustained support of human and institutional capacity building, and accompanying investments in infrastructure, communication and market development, giving birth to the Green Revolution, whose major architect and our friend - Norman Borlaug - is here with us today.

The Green Revolution tremendously boosted food production and food security in Asia and parts of Latin America but, unfortunately, bypassed Africa because we were at an earlier stage of development and our human, institutional and infrastructure capacity could not harness and sustain the benefits of the new technologies. Today, if we are not careful, both the Information and Gene Revolutions will also pass Africa by and our problems will continue to escalate.

But I believe Africa is ready to open a new chapter of collaborative public-private sector partnerships to accelerate economic development. Many governments have embraced critical political and economic reforms that are opening up new and competitive trade and investment opportunities. We are also committed to increasing public investments in agriculture and rural sectors, and have jointly – under the NEPAD's Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) – outlined strategic agricultural investments needed for

renewed economic growth. Implementation of these strategies will require a concerted and coordinated effort between our governments and development partners.

External support for Africa's agriculture and economic development has ebbed and flowed since the 1960s, with a significant decline in the 1980s and 1990s. While we are excited by the renewed focus on fighting hunger and poverty in Africa, as shown by new initiatives at the World Bank, USAID, the G-8, the United Nations and others, we are increasingly concerned that promised resource flows are not yet forthcoming.

A new report by the *Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa* and *Resources for the Future* reveals that U.S. funding for agricultural development in sub-Saharan Africa was stagnant from 2000 to 2004. This stands in stark contrast to dramatic increases in U.S. funding for health programs in Africa. Increased health funding is critical, but agricultural development should not be allowed to languish. Food, economic development and health are interdependent. Without adequate food, people will never be healthy; without economic growth in total communities, African nations will remain dependent on external assistance to sustain their health systems and meet other basic human needs.

Increasingly, Africa is proving that it is ready for business. Ghana's Stock Exchange has one of the highest rates of return to investments in the world. Africa's cell phone industry is the fastest growing in the world. Many multi-national companies in energy, auto and food industries are expanding their business investments, confident of Africa's economic future. These are truths that you will hardly hear from media. But we have to work together to project Africa for what it is...the greatest untapped market of the future.

In conclusion, Madam Chairperson, I would like to encourage all governments, private sector and civil society represented here and across the world to join with us in the quest of meeting the UN Millennium development Goals by implementing identified African-led priorities that will stimulate economic growth and effectively reduce hunger, malnutrition and poverty in our communities.

The African ambassadors in Washington, D.C. are taking this issue seriously and have formed a new Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development to draw attention to investing in Africa's agriculture and rural development as the most viable means to fight hunger, poverty and malnutrition in Africa. We look forward to working with you in this noble task. A prosperous Africa is good for the U.S. and the world.