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## Rising food prices highlight need to boost investment in agriculture – UN official



Rising food prices are a serious problem in Gulf nations which are highly dependent on imports

23 November 2010 – The head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) today [stressed](#) the need to boost investment in agriculture to ensure long-term food security, while also calling for urgent structural changes to the global food system.

“The food price and economic crises have had a severe impact on millions of people in all parts of the world,” FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf said in an address to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Ministerial Forum on Agricultural Investment in Abu Dhabi.

The global prices of most agricultural commodities have increased, many of them sharply, in recent months. In addition, FAO warned in its latest Food Outlook report that global food import bills may pass the \$1 trillion mark in 2010, a level not seen since food prices peaked in 2008.

“These trends can have severe implications for countries like the Gulf countries, which depend on commercial imports for a large share of their food consumption needs,” said Mr. Diouf.

According to FAO, the number of hungry and malnourished people in the Near East and North Africa is currently estimated at 37 million, nearly 10 per cent of the region’s population.

Mr. Diouf added that the rapid increase in hunger and malnourishment since the food crisis of 2008 reveals the inadequacy of the present global food system and the urgent need for structural changes.

These could include short-term measures such as targeted safety nets and social protection programmes as well as reliable and timely information on food commodity markets. Small-scale farmers must be assured access to indispensable means of production and technologies – such as high-quality seeds, fertilizers, feed and farming tools and equipment, said FAO.

Investment in agriculture is a must in the medium and longer term, the agency noted, stating that food-deficit countries must be given the necessary technical and financial solutions and policy tools to enhance their agricultural sectors in terms of productivity and resilience in the face of crises.

While in the United Arab Emirates, Mr. Diouf also named Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, the wife of the founder and the first President of UAE, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, as Extraordinary Ambassador of FAO.

Sheikha Fatima, who has been active in the fields of literacy, maternal and child care, the disabled, the elderly and orphans, has played “a pivotal role in consolidating and promoting the women's rights movement in the Arab world,” said Mr. Diouf.

In addition, Mr. Diouf and Rashid Ahmed bin Fahad, UAE Minister of Environment and Water, announced the establishment of the UAE-financed “Sheikh Zayed Centre” at FAO headquarters in Rome. The new international multi-media conference centre will provide the live broadcasting facilities and capacity-building infrastructures necessary to continue the fight against hunger and to enhance knowledge sharing and e-learning throughout the organization.

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