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**LECTURE IN HONOUR OF FRANK L. MCDOUGALL
DELIVERED BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MOUSSA HUSSEIN ABDULLAH AL-SARRAF,
MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND STATE MINISTER OF
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ON BEHALF OF
HIS HIGHNESS SHEIKH NASSER AL-MOHAMMAD AL-AHMAD AL-SABAH,
PRIME MINISTER OF KUWAIT**

Mr Director-General

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to deliver this lecture on behalf of His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of Kuwait in memory of Mr Frank McDougall.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, for his kind invitation to participate in this session and deliver the lecture.

Throughout the Conference sessions many distinguished personalities have delivered lectures in memory of Mr McDougall. I should like to begin by expressing my deep gratitude to Mr McDougall and paying tribute to his efforts which led to the establishment of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

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Mr Director-General

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

I should like to take this opportunity to address some of the issues that relate to ongoing efforts to combat poverty and hunger and the potential for achieving the related objectives.

First, let me point out that eliminating poverty and hunger has caught the attention of the international community for several decades now. Indeed, the World Food Conference, celebrated in 1974, stressed that "every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop their physical and mental faculties". However, the target set by the World Food Conference of eliminating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition within ten years was not reached, which led to the convening of the 1996 World Food Summit at FAO Headquarters. This Summit was viewed as a historical event, with its renewed commitment at the highest global and political levels to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and to ensure food security for all.

The subsequent United Nations Millennium Declaration of the year 2000 falls within this context, as do its associated Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As you know, there are eight such development goals, the first being to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and to reduce by half the number of poor and hungry by 2015. The agreed goals are within our reach, so long as all partners remain committed to mutual cooperation and to their responsibilities. In fact, poor countries have pledged to create an enabling environment and the conditions needed to realize the desired goals; this is in addition to introducing the necessary reforms and implementing appropriate policies. They have also committed themselves to good governance, transparency, the elimination of fraud, implementation of strategies against poverty, and the allocation of additional resources to social sectors such as health and education. For their part, developed countries have undertaken to support the efforts of poor countries, through financial assistance, debt relief and the foundations for equitable and fair global trade.

In light of the above expectations and requirements to build a better future for the world's poor and hungry we must ask ourselves where we now stand in relation to our commitments and engagements. The second obvious question refers to what we are doing in the light of what has been achieved and what we still need to do to move forward and achieve our goals.

According to reports by FAO and other UN organizations, there has been progress in some regions and countries in reducing the number of poor and hungry people, but the overall outcome has fallen short of our hopes and expectations. There are still about 850 million people suffering from poverty and hunger, although we are midway towards the year 2015 since the Millennium Declaration of 2000. Truly alarming is this slow pace towards achieving our historical goal, which represents a common vision of the international community and is the first step towards subsequently redoubling our efforts to completely eradicate poverty and hunger worldwide. Millions of people are still suffering from poverty in a world of accelerating progress in knowledge, technology, communication and other areas. In our globalizing world, the poor are still unable to escape isolation, alleviate their suffering and fully exploit their potential and thus decide for themselves and live in dignity.

Mr Director-General

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Despite the current situation, there is still room for achieving the desired goals, in particular eradicating poverty and hunger. What are we doing to save millions of people and ensure their inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition by 2015?

On several occasions, at conferences and seminars, the international community has expressed its willingness and hope to reach the desired target through commitments, engagements, action plans and programmes designed on the basis of studies and recommendations. It therefore comes down to the capacity of partners to meet the challenges and provide the proper conditions for success.

What can the partners do under current circumstances to make progress towards eliminating poverty and hunger and reaching other objectives, before it is too late? All indications point to an urgent need to provide additional financial assistance to poor countries and to build a more equitable structure for international trade, while paying greater attention to agriculture and countering the effects and implications of poverty and hunger. I will now discuss briefly each of these issues.

As concerns financial assistance, the international community recognized in previous conferences, including the Johannesburg Conference, that achieving the desired objectives will not be possible unless adequate financial resources are allocated to key activities, projects and programmes in fields such as health, education, drinking water, sanitation and agricultural production. I would like to refer, in this context, to the Debt Relief Initiative launched by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1990s for the heavily indebted poor countries. Beneficiary countries were able to allocate a larger portion of funds made available by debt relief to core strategic activities against poverty. However, despite the importance of this initiative, the funds were still not sufficient to fill the funding gaps for activities aimed at eradicating poverty and hunger and achieving sustainable development on the economic, social, and environment levels.

In this context and aware of the importance of having adequate resources for the development process, the international community called upon developed countries, through the United Nations, to allocate 0.7 percent of their GNP to Official Development Assistance (ODA) in developing countries. However, the actual contribution of those countries is barely half that percentage. Given the current circumstances and conditions, we call upon those countries to redouble their efforts. Otherwise it will be difficult to achieve the planned goals and targets.

I have chosen to raise this issue given my country's interest in cooperation for development. More than forty-five years ago it established the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development which is a specialized independent institution for development assistance. The Fund's activities now cover 101 developing countries around the world, mostly least developed countries, including forty in Africa. The Fund's efforts succeeded in funding over 720 projects for a total of over US\$ 13.6 billion in agriculture, energy, water, sanitation, transportation, communication, health and education, in addition to supporting the activities of social funds and development banks which play a major role in supporting projects on the medium, small and micro levels. This in turn offers new employment opportunities and contributes to alleviating poverty and hunger.

The activities of the Kuwait Fund are not limited to funding projects. They also encompass technical assistance, grants for consultancy services and support activities to enhance the technical and administrative capacity of many developing countries. The Kuwait Fund has also always been ready to provide support and assistance for any debt relief initiative, such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative and the Debt Cancellation Initiative for amounts due to the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) and the African Development Fund (ADF).

Taking into consideration the activities of the Kuwait Fund in developing countries as a whole, in addition to grants and funds provided by the Kuwaiti Government, ODA from Kuwait to the developing countries between 1970 and 2006 averaged over 2 percent of GNP per year, which is almost three times the percentage set by the United Nations. Although Kuwait is a developing country and its economy is still heavily dependent on oil, a key diminishing natural resource, it has made every effort to act as a supportive partner in development, aware of the importance of cooperation to enable developing countries to achieve growth, progress and well-being for their citizens.

As regards international trade in an era of globalization and fierce competition among countries to access global export markets, we need to consider the current balance of international transactions between developed and developing countries and the great discrepancy that exists between their economic, technical, technological and administrative capacities. We also need to consider the rules and regulations that govern the flow of goods and services between those countries.

The international community recognized the importance of the close relationship between trade and development when the Ministers of Trade gathered at the Doha Ministerial Conference of November 2001 and adopted the Development Agenda, thus giving top priority in the World Trade Organization to development issues in the interests of developing countries. Furthermore, the Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Hong Kong Conference in December 2005 reiterated the importance of the development dimension in the Doha programme of work, and launched an initiative to help developing countries build their capacities and expand their trade activities.

Such interest in building the trade capacity of developing countries, by providing technical aid and assistance, stems from the fact that the developing countries that have succeeded in increasing their capacity to access global markets are those that have also succeeded in making substantial progress in alleviating poverty and in improving the living conditions of their populations. However, other developing countries have been unable to foster economic growth and poverty alleviation through trade activity.

Therefore, building the trade capacity of developing countries is one of the elements that would enable trade to play an active role in development and poverty alleviation. Other elements include removing obstacles and constraints on exports to developed countries, thus allowing developing countries to benefit from globalization and avoiding ineffective economic reforms in those countries, particularly trade liberalization.

In order to increase the capacity of developing countries to compete in global markets there needs to be an adequate infrastructure for the market flow of goods and services. Competence in business management to seize opportunities in an efficient and effective manner is also required.

Mr Director-General

Excellencies

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Agriculture has a major role to play in the economies of developing countries and is also a primary source of foreign currency. At least 75 percent of the world's poor live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Therefore, increasing agricultural production is a fundamental element in combating poverty, both in producing food for local consumption or exports for the global market. Much attention has been paid to agriculture over the years, as shown by the establishment of the Food and Agriculture Organization by the international community more than six decades ago – this FAO where we are gathered today and to which I should like to convey our gratitude for all the efforts it is making to achieve food security for all. The international community reiterated its interest in agriculture when it established the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in which the OPEC countries, especially Kuwait, played a historical role.

Given that agriculture is a guarantor of food security for all, the flow of agricultural products across borders should be aligned with production and marketing policies, with due consideration of the impact of those policies on the poverty and hunger that the international community has undertaken to eradicate. Agricultural trade issues have indeed been placed on the Doha Round agenda but are still unresolved, including the significant support that the OECD countries give their farmers. We truly hope that these negotiations will be concluded on a platform of justice and equality among all parties, in the knowledge that the free trade of agricultural commodities, especially food crops, will help free hundreds of millions of people from poverty and hunger.

While aware of the important role of agriculture in providing food, we also need to heed its sustainability in a context of population growth, limited availability of land and water and the need for environmental protection. Those are the challenges that we must overcome through rules and policies that will stop desertification and soil erosion, rationalize the use of irrigation water and provide farmers with the knowledge and technology they need for their particular circumstances and environments.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

The plagues of poverty, hunger and disease that we are witnessing today in various regions of the globe are counterbalanced by prosperity, progress and well-being in other regions of the world. This reflects the discrepancies that exist in what is commonly known as the Global-Village brought about by globalization. The former scenario is discouraging and is inconsistent with the humanitarian dimension of humanity and with the construction of a world of peace, security and well-being for future generations.

Eliminating poverty and hunger is not limited to the human dimension – it has also economic, social, political, and environmental dimensions. The poor, the hungry and the sick are marginalized. Their potential is not exploited and they are denied their most basic human rights. In order to strengthen and implement democracy, freedom and justice, the poor and the hungry need the conditions and capabilities to avoid disillusion, despair and consequent recourse to the chaos, violence and disruption that can threaten political and social stability, undermine the development process and increase the number of people suffering from poverty.

At the same time, political instability, internal conflicts and wars produce devastation and many victims, destroy economies and hinder the development process. Efforts should therefore be made to build peace and eradicate poverty and hunger – because building peace goes hand in hand with development.

The populations of many countries in the Arab region are suffering from instability, insecurity and poor living conditions, including Iraq which we hope will regain stability and security and enjoy peace and development in an environment of security and confidence in the future well-being of its people. In Palestine, we are all aware of the daily sufferings of the Palestinian people that stem from the embargo imposed by the Israeli occupation, which limits their freedom of movement and prevents them from enjoying their rights on their own land. We look forward to putting an end to that long-lasting occupation and enabling the Palestinian people to enjoy their rights in their land and building an independent state. In the meantime, other Arab countries are facing political crises that remain unresolved and that are preventing them from engaging in the development process.

In conclusion, I should like to reiterate that we are still able to achieve our goals, in particular our goal of freeing hundreds of millions of people from poverty, hunger, disease and malnutrition and enabling them, in dignity, to play an active role in the international community and its shared interests. First and foremost, this requires a renewed commitment of all partners, including UN Agencies, international, regional and national development organizations, donor and developing countries, the private sector and NGOs, each playing their respective role according to capability and competence. They should redouble their efforts to help us meet our targets before the endeavour becomes more complex and costly. I have every confidence that together we will be able to seize this opportunity to prevail.

May God bless you all.