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World Food Security

Stephen Smith

Paper prepared for presentation at the “World Food Security: Can Private Sector R&D Feed the Poor?” conference conducted by the Crawford Fund for International Agricultural Research, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, October 27-28, 2009

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World Food Security

THE HON. STEPHEN SMITH MP
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Sir John Crawford was a great Australian who was focussed on the good Australia could do in the world to help the poor and the hungry.

It is an honour to open this year's Crawford Fund Conference as we continue to work towards those same goals.

The global food security crisis is far from over. Food prices have come down since 2008 but they remain high. Poor households in developing countries, who often spend 70% of their income on food, continue to suffer. A billion people, one in every seven on our planet, go to bed hungry. When faced with these facts, good international citizens must respond and act together.

Australia is committed to being a good international citizen. Australia is the 15th largest economy and we will continue to play our part to help those less fortunate.

STEPHEN SMITH was sworn in as Minister for Foreign Affairs on 3 December 2007; he was previously the Shadow Minister for Education and Training. A barrister and solicitor by profession, he completed his Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws at the University of Western Australia, and a Master of Laws at London University, subsequently teaching law in London. During 1991 and 1992, he was Special Adviser to the Prime Minister and Senior Adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer, Paul Keating. He has been the Federal Member for Perth since March 1993. During 1996 and 1997, Mr Smith served as a member of the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.

To address food security we must respond on several levels:

- humanitarian assistance to those in the most severe need
- development assistance, including through the strengthening of markets
- scientific research to increase crop and live-stock production
- action on developing country access to international markets by dismantling the barriers that distort trade in agricultural products. This will lead to better-functioning markets and more stable prices.

The international community, with the wake-up call of the 2008 food security crisis, recognises that we all have a stake in food production.

Like so many of the challenges we face today, food security can only be addressed effectively by nations acting together. Australia is strongly committed to international cooperation through both regional and multilateral approaches to these common challenges.

Last year, G8 leaders adopted an ad hoc statement on food security at the Hokkaido Summit. This year, at the G8 meeting in Italy, 40 states and international organisations approved the L'Aquila Initiative on Global Food Security. G20 leaders have focussed on food security and committed to provide the US\$20 billion pledged at L'Aquila to increase funding for agricultural development.

This is an edited version of the Minister's speech

Last month in New York, I presented a case for greater multilateral involvement in food security at a ministerial-level forum at the UN General Assembly hosted by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

In the early days of the food security crisis last year, Australia made prompt and generous contributions to key multilateral agencies. In May 2008 we provided \$50 million for the World Bank's food security crisis response program and \$30 million for the World Food Programme's special appeal. To further cement Australia's commitment, yesterday I signed a four-year \$180 million Strategic Partnership Agreement with Ms Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP).

The WFP is the largest and most effective international food aid organisation. Ms Sheeran told me that, at any time, WFP only has enough funding certainty for 12 weeks of operations, making it very difficult to plan ahead and buy food at the best possible price. Through the partnership, the first of its kind between a donor country and the WFP, Australia will provide long-term guaranteed funding to the WFP to enhance its ability to plan for both crisis and longer term humanitarian feeding programs. I am particularly pleased that \$40 million under the new partnership will be dedicated to school feeding programs in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In our meeting we discussed Australia's comprehensive approach to tackling hunger. Ms Sheeran was kind enough to describe Australia as a 'model donor' and she expressed the hope that other countries would follow Australia's lead on prompt, generous and flexible responses to global hunger.

The food security crisis of 2008 brought into stark focus not only the fragile state of global food security but also the decline in our focus and our effort, globally, on agriculture and agricultural research. In the last three decades agriculture's share of overseas aid has declined from 17% to less than 4%.

Australia was no exception, but in this year's Budget the Government set out to redress this. We announced increased funding for Food Security through Rural Development of \$464 million over four years. A key objective of this funding is to lift research to boost agricultural productivity because with growing populations and declining availability of land, increasing agricultural productivity is vital.

We will increase funding to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and continue to play a very active role in its reform process.

In the Budget the Government also delivered a substantial funding increase for ACIAR. ACIAR's funding will grow from around \$64 million this year to more than \$87 million by 2012–2013. This money will be well used in the interests of feeding the world's poor.

Internationally, Australian agricultural research is held in high regard — thanks to the work of organisations such as the Crawford Fund, ACIAR and AusAID. Unfortunately, this is not nearly so well understood in Australia.

A substantial portion of the Government's food security initiative will go towards work in Africa. We are committed to increasing Australia's involvement with Africa where Australian agricultural researchers have a great deal to contribute. We will be doing more to support Africa's efforts to feed its people and to extend trade through regional market integration. Whether in Africa or generally, food security is not just about the supply of food. It is also about poor people's ability to purchase food.

The task of feeding billions of people is huge, but we can do it if we think creatively and work collectively; this Conference is an excellent forum for sharing ideas.

I thank you for investing your time in contributing to its success.