



**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND
FISHERIES, Ms TINA JOEMAT-PETTERSSON: WORLD FOOD DAY:
MQANDULI VILLAGE, MTHATHA: 16 OCTOBER 2011**

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HONOURABLE KING OF ABATHEMBU

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INVITED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

“My government’s commitment to create a people-centred society of liberty binds us to the pursuit of the goals of freedom we want, freedom from hunger, freedom from deprivation, freedom from ignorance, freedom from suppression and freedom from fear. These freedoms are fundamental to the guarantee of human dignity”.

These profound words were uttered by one of the founding fathers of our nascent democracy, the iconic Nelson Mandela, on his first State of the Nation Address in May 1994.

Indeed we must ask the question how can our people have human dignity when they don’t have freedom from hunger?

This year’s theme for World Food Day *“Food Prices – from crisis to stability* – is relevant in the current set of circumstances under which we find ourselves in respect of food security and the ever-increasing food prices.

There is no doubt that rising food prices are always a concern due to their potential for diminishing the food security of the poor as well as their potential for creating political instability as seen during 2008 in many countries.

Three years after the 2008 food and financial crises, food prices on the international markets are rising again. In South Africa and the rest of Africa, price volatility hits poor people the hardest, as they already spend the majority of their income on feeding their families.

“Farming is not an easy thing” - As Madiba observed in one of the many conversations he had had with one of the struggle icons, Ahmed Kathrada, in the early 90s.

The World Bank’s food price index increased by 15% between October 2010 and January 2011, and is only 3% below its 2008 peak.

The frequency of extreme weather-related events over the past year and their impact on food prices underscore the vulnerability of the poor to climate change.

There is also consensus in Africa and the rest of the World about the patterns in world food prices that current price increases are not typical of past increases because of the following points:

- Food prices are rising at an unusually rapid rate;
- Volatility is greater, particularly for oilseeds and cereals;
- Duration of the price increases is likely to be longer;
- Breadth of products affected is much greater—nearly all major food prices are rising as well as fuel, transport, manufactured goods and fertilizers.

The current status is that a significant number of South Africans are food insecure and vulnerable to hunger.

“We need not be ashamed in admitting that poverty is still with us. It is not enough to say that we have inherited it. It is more important to take steps as a matter of the utmost urgency to put an end to it.”

As Madiba, once again, noted: *“Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings”.*

We have taken heed of such wise words to eradicate poverty hence the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is introducing the Zero Hunger Campaign which is aimed at eradicating hunger in terms of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular MDG 1.

The Zero Hunger Campaign is a concept that South Africa has borrowed from the Brazilians through which we will eradicate hunger and food insecurity for all South Africans through the production of affordable good quality food.

Once Cabinet has deliberated and approved this ground-breaking plan, we will be in a position to give more details.

The Constitution of South Africa refers to food in Section 27, 1 (b) of the bill of rights which states that *“every citizen has a right of access to sufficient food and water and the State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the realisation of this right”*.

The Land Reform programmes should prioritise land availability to support food security initiatives, and land access by the vulnerable groups of the society.

Women are usually responsible to take care of the household food needs and therefore, access to land for women should be a priority.

The internationally agreed to Millennium Development Goals and the 1996 Rome declaration on World Food Security are some of the key agreements that compel us to intensify the food security interventions in the country.

According to Stats SA (GHS 2009) about three million households are having severe and inadequate access to food and over 72% of this population group resides in rural areas.

This therefore calls for a well defined rural inclined programme to curb food insecurity in these dwellings. The country is having the highest rates of income inequalities in the world, with the richest 10% of the population receiving almost half of the GDP and the poorest 20% receiving only 3.3%.

The Quarterly Food Price Monitoring report recently produced by the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC), one of our SOEs, indicated a trend in rural and urban food price disparity - consumers in rural areas pay more than the consumers in urban areas.

On average, from 2008 to June 2011, rural consumers are paying about R16, 22 more than the urban consumers when buying the same food products. This is as a result of the inefficiencies of the commercial food value chain.

Another determinant of food price hikes is the apparent collusion of prices within the food industry and the Competition Commission has been successful in penalising companies that were found to be involved in this non-competitive market behavior, but relatively no significant food price drop has been realised. Instead, food price trends continue to be on the rise.

South Africa has always relied on imports to meet wheat and meat requirements, but recently 40% more agricultural products were imported when compared to the past five years. This therefore calls for a robust investment in enabling the agri-industry to be able to meet the domestic food requirements.

Annual average Producer Price Index recorded in the year 2002 [13.5%] and 2008 [14.5%] were one of the highest records. These were two respective years where the food price hikes reached a threatening food security crisis situation.

With the crop production figures for maize finalized, it can be concluded that there is enough maize to supply the population needs, at least until the next harvesting season.

Government is partnering with the agricultural sector and institutions such as FAO, ARC, UNICEF, and other key stakeholders to improve the existing food security initiatives.

Finally, the world, through next month's Durban COP17, must agree over the medium term, to raise investments in environmentally sustainable agricultural productivity, climate change adaptation measures, and finding less food intensive biofuel technologies which are all necessary to mitigate the impact of food price volatility on the most vulnerable.

In conclusion, Madiba said, and I quote: *“In this new century, millions of people in the world’s poorest countries remain imprisoned, enslaved and in chains. They are trapped in the prison of poverty. It is time to see them free”*.

Let us do our utmost best to fulfill Madiba’s wish and ensure that we unshackle our people from the chains of poverty.

Let us indeed ensure that this year’s theme becomes a reality –“Food Prices – from crisis to stability”.

I thank you!