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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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WORLD FOOD DAY

Today is World Food Day, and I want to take this opportunity to talk to you about the problems of hunger and poverty, about what the world is doing to try to solve those problems, and about how Australia is contributing.

We sometimes become preoccupied by what we see as significant problems here in Australia, and there is no doubt that many of these problems are real. But it doesn't hurt to remember that there are vast numbers of people in the world who are much worse off than we are. In a relatively affluent country like Australia, it is easy to forget that about 1,000 million people in the world have an income of no more than \$200 a year.

That means they have less than 55¢ a day to spend on food, clothing, housing, transport and all the other services that most Australians take for granted. Those people live in inadequate housing, without proper water supplies, roads, electricity, medical services or education. What is worse, many of them do not even have enough to eat. They can't go down to a corner shop and buy a loaf of bread when they are hungry: if there was a corner store, in all likelihood its shelves would be empty.

What is particularly tragic is that the world grows enough food to feed everyone, yet the problems of hunger and poverty are getting worse, not better. At the international level, various things have been done to try to overcome these appalling problems.

Attempts have been made to try to arrange for a better distribution of food throughout the world, to provide better access to world markets for the products of developing countries, to provide better financial arrangements for those countries and to help them with their energy problems. But these initiatives have so far had only limited results. There is still a great deal to be done. We have been particularly disappointed that attempts to launch major negotiations on the problems of developing countries have so far been unsuccessful. Efforts must continue, because the need for international solutions to those problems is urgent.

I am sure most Australians would agree that poverty and hunger are among the greatest problems which humanity faces, and as one of the world's major trading nations - as one of the largest food exporting nations - Australia is in a position to help significantly. Indeed, we have already done a number of important things. We played a major role at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Melbourne last year which did so much to get the international community to think more about how to tackle these problems, and we are continuing to play an active role in international forums to try to get all countries to recognise that poverty and hunger are calamities for mankind, and that solutions must be found.

This year the Australian Government will spend nearly \$740 million on aid to the world's developing countries. We are also providing technical assistance and advisers to help those countries to develop their own agricultural resources, and to help them build roads and dams and other essential services. The new Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research will ensure that Australia's agricultural research skills are used as effectively as possible to help developing countries increase their own food production.

Trade is one of the major engines of economic development, and significant barriers to trade are one of the factors holding back the development of many of the poorer countries of the world. There is an urgent need for all countries, acting together, to reduce obstacles to trade, and developing countries would be major beneficiaries if agreement to do so could be reached.

Australia was one of the first countries to give special preferences to a range of imports from less developed countries. We have initiated studies of the particular trade problems that developing countries face, and we have put proposals to international meetings on world economic and trade problems which, if adopted, would help developing countries significantly.

But there is still a need for more energy - for a much greater commitment - by all countries acting together to tackle the trade problems faced by the developing nations. Greater access to world markets is by far the best way to enable developing countries to stand on their own feet, and to become less dependent on official aid, and to be able to do something about the standard of life for their own people.

The greatest single problem faced by many developing countries remains that of food security. There is an urgent need to increase food production in a large number of countries, and an equally urgent need to ensure that those countries consistently have sufficient supplies of food at reasonable prices.

Australia has done a great deal to help to solve this problem. This year we will provide about 450,000 tonnes of grain for food for needy countries, and we have called on other countries to increase their food aid. In addition, we are helping developing countries to increase the productivity of their own farms so that they are able more easily to feed themselves. Internationally, work has been done on securing a wheat price stabilisation agreement and to encourage the building up of food stocks so that reserve supplies will be available in times of particular need. But progress has been slow, and in many countries - despite what has been done - the problem of food security is greater today than it was 20 years ago.

The problems of hunger and poverty are significant and tragic indeed. If the international community cannot agree on action to be taken together, then mankind will not only carry a heavy responsibility for failing to solve these serious human problems, its failure also will contribute to international instability and make the world a more difficult place than it already is.

Australians are increasingly becoming aware of this, and the Government will continue to use every avenue open to it to play its part in overcoming world-wide poverty and hunger.

World Food Day is an occasion when all of us should reflect on these problems, on what they mean to the people who face them and on what more we can do to help solve them.