



**High Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly  
United Nations Headquarters, 20-22 September 2010**

**Roundtable 1: Poverty, Hunger and Gender Equality  
Speech by Joanna Kerr, Chief Executive Officer, ActionAid**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Food riots which killed more than 10 people in Mozambique earlier this month were a wake-up call to the reality that only one or two failed harvests could be enough to tip the world into another full-fledged food crisis. Two and a half years after the global food crisis hit, still close to a billion people remain chronically hungry and probably two billion are food insecure, meaning they are vulnerable to the smallest increase in food prices. Yet ActionAid's hunger scorecard reveals that few countries have taken robust steps to prevent the next crisis.

This inertia is completely unacceptable. We know what needs to be done. Among us today are leaders of nations who have successfully combated hunger. China, Brazil, Malawi and Vietnam, to name just a few, have done so by boosting government support to the smallholder farmers who grow most of the food consumed locally, implementing agrarian reforms, and establishing effective social protection programmes. Not only is investing in smallholder agriculture the best way to beat hunger, it also has two to four times more impact on poverty reduction as investment in other sectors.

Discrimination against women is a hidden and insidious cause of hunger. According to the OECD, in the 21 countries where social institutions discriminate against women the most, malnutrition is nearly twice as high. In countries where women lack any access to credit, malnutrition is 85% above average. Where women lack the right to own land, it is 60% higher. The call to action is clear: along with investment in agriculture we need to equalise women's access to and control over productive resources and financial services.

In 2009, rich countries pledged "decisive action to free humankind from hunger", including "substantially increasing aid to agriculture and food security" after years of decline. It is unacceptable that these grand promises have so far yielded only \$6million in new money – in a year in which more than \$15 trillion was spent bailing out financial companies.

Before the next food crisis strikes, now is the time for coordinated action to support every country to implement a plan for halving hunger, to enable rural women and men to farm their way out of poverty. The UN estimates that this would cost around \$40bn per year, less than a tenth of the \$450 billion that ActionAid estimates is lost to developing countries every year because of hunger's devastating impact on bodies, minds and earnings. We can have no common and prosperous future, when close to one billion people suffer from chronic hunger. Let us not allow another UN conference to end without a plan of action to end hunger for good, and the necessary funds committed to put it into action.

20<sup>th</sup> September, 2010.