

PRESS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release
October 17, 2007**

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Conference materials are available at:

<http://www.ifpri.org/2020chinaconference/index.htm>

International Conference Convened to Take Action for the World's Poor and Hungry People

Marks Halfway Point between Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Declaration and Deadline

BEIJING—More than 400 policymakers and experts from around the world are gathering in Beijing today for the three-day conference, “Taking Action for the World’s Poor and Hungry People,” to assess progress achieved in reducing global poverty and hunger and to identify new approaches for improving the welfare of the world’s most deprived people.

The conference occurs at the halfway point between the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) declaration of halving the proportion of the world’s poor and hungry people by 2015. While the world is on track to reach this target at the global level, many developing countries are not and millions of poor people are at risk of being left behind.

" Our global scorecard is mixed. The proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day has fallen, and we remain on track to meet the MDG target of halving extreme poverty. But progress has been uneven, and some regions -- particularly sub-Saharan Africa -- are not on track to redeem even a single one of our grand promises, ” said United National Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in a statement released at the conference today.

“I commend the [conference] organizers for addressing this theme as we work to step up our efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals,” said Ban.

Co-organized by the Chinese State Council Leading Group Office on Poverty Alleviation (LGOP) and Development and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and hosted by the International Poverty Reduction Center in China, IFPRI, and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, the conference runs from October 17-19 and brings together stakeholders from government, development agencies, academia, and civil society.

Mr. Hui Liangyu, Vice Premier of China State Council, and Director of State Council Leading Group of Poverty Alleviation and Development, Mr. Fan Xiaojian, Director of LGOP, Mr. Joachim Von Braun, Director General at IFPRI, and Mr. Lennart Bage, President of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) will attend and address the opening ceremony. There will be 31 participants at ministerial level, including 11 from China.

“Our research shows that current poverty reduction approaches are not reaching the poorest people in developing countries,” said Joachim von Braun. “We need to urgently address the unique challenges they face each day, or they will fall further behind.”

Although impressive progress has been made in some developing regions, one billion people worldwide still live on less than one dollar a day, the threshold defined by the international community as absolute poverty, below which survival is in question. However, this large number masks the multitude of people living in varying degrees of poverty—with large numbers of them surviving on less than fifty cents a day.

During the past two decades, poverty increased slightly in Latin America and the Caribbean and rose significantly in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, however, the number of poor people in Asia declined by approximately 300 million, particularly in East Asia and the Pacific.

China, in particular, has made great strides in reducing poverty and has met the MDG poverty target ahead of schedule. The country’s strong economic growth in recent decades has

translated into steep declines in poverty. According to official Chinese statistics, the countries' rural population without adequate food and shelter decreased from 250 million in 1978 to 21 million in 2006, and the instance of poverty dropped from 30.7 percent to 2.3 percent. However, this progress has been unequal and many pockets of poverty remain throughout the country, particularly in rural areas.

“This conference presents a unique opportunity to share China’s successes and challenges for resolving the problem of poverty and hunger with other countries around the world,” said Mr. Fan Xiaojian. “The theme of the conference is in line with the issues discussed this week at the Seventeenth National Congress for the Communist Party of China, which will serve to further the scientific concept of development and to center government focus on social harmony and human needs.”

Among research to be presented at the conference includes new findings by IFPRI and Chinese researchers on how those who live closer to the dollar a day line have been much easier to reach than those living well below it. The incidence of poverty below half a dollar a day—the poorest of the poor—was found to be intractable in many regions of the world as poverty is frequently inherited from generation to generation, and as it is, chances for a better livelihood are diminished. Exacerbating such poverty traps is the widespread exclusion the poor face due to ethnicity, gender or disability as well as their limited access to critical basic services, such as roads, markets, schools and health care.

During the conference, experts from around the world will share their research and experiences with the goal of creating a better understanding of who are the very poorest and why they are being left behind, how existing actions to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger can be accelerated or scaled up, and which approaches have been successful thus far in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. Special attention will be paid to the critical role social protection policies play in helping to improve the welfare of the poorest people.