

REUTERS

Africa must unite to tackle rising food prices -AU

Fri Jun 27, 2008 6:16am EDT



1 of 1 [Full Size](#)

RELATED NEWS

[Food crisis looms as Nepal Maoists set to take power](#)

25 Jun 2008

By Daniel Wallis and Cynthia Johnston

SHARM EL SHEIKH, Egypt, June 27 (Reuters) - African Union states must unite to reduce the impact of soaring food prices that have hit their citizens harder than the rest of the world, the continent's top diplomat warned on Friday.

Experts say poor harvests, high fuel costs and rising demand, especially from fast-growing Asian nations, mean one billion people worldwide are now threatened by hunger.

"This sharp increase (in basic food prices) has had a particularly negative effect on African countries," Jean Ping, chairman of the AU Commission, told AU foreign ministers meeting in Egypt.

"In the medium and long term, the Commission proposes measures to regulate speculation, the sharing of public cereal stocks, strengthening the financing of imports and reliable food aid, promoting investment in social protection and increased investment to boost agricultural production."

Commodity prices have doubled over the last couple of years and the World Bank says that 100 million people risk joining the 850 million already going hungry. The United Nations says food output must double by 2050 to meet demand.

Ping did not give details of his proposals, but he said it was crucial African countries negotiate with the West with one voice on the food crisis, as well as on soaring energy costs.

"The increase in oil prices puts huge pressure on the finances of many African countries that are petroleum importers, and it increases transport costs, which exacerbate the food crisis," he said.

He said an AU summit in Mozambique in 2003 had instructed his Commission to coordinate Africa's stance in the current round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks, which he said were crucial to avoiding commodity price shocks in the future.

But he said that these had not been completely successful -- especially the thrashing out of controversial Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the European Union.

"At the WTO talks and the EPA, our negotiators clearly laid out Africa's concerns in the fields of business and development," Ping said. "But it must be said, Africa's expectations in these negotiations, and in particular the EPAs, are not yet fully satisfied." (Editing by Mark Trevelyan)
(For full Reuters Africa coverage and to have your say on the top issues, visit: africa.reuters.com/)