

“The First High-Level Biofuels Seminar in Africa”
Addis Ababa, 30 July 2007
Opening Ceremony

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here on behalf of the the Chair of the Global Bioenergy Partnership, and to participate in the opening ceremony of this important Seminar. I would like to thank the African Union, the Brazilian Government and UNIDO for their invitation, and the Government of Ethiopia for welcoming us in Addis Ababa.

Bioenergy is rapidly emerging as a top priority on the international agenda as countries face the triple challenges of ensuring food security, energy security and sustainable development. Scarce natural resources must be managed responsibly to meet these goals and to ensure that one is not attained at the expense of another.

The Global Bioenergy Partnership is built upon the commitment to promote bioenergy for energy security, food security and sustainable development. It was established to reflect the commitments taken by the G8 +5 Countries in the 2005 G8 Summit in Gleneagles, and was recently invited by the G8 Summit in Heiligendamm to “continue its work on biofuel best practices and take forward the successful and sustainable development of bioenergy”.

Around 20 Partners, representing most of the G8 +5 Countries, International Organizations, NGOs and business associations, agreed to work together in this Partnership promote bioenergy for sustainable development. GBEP provides a framework to enhance coordination and development of bioenergy activities at an international level, facilitate multi-stakeholder involvement, and to foster capacity building and technology transfer.

GBEP promotes sharing of knowledge, technologies and skills between stakeholders and countries in all directions – North-North, North-South, South-North and South-South and we are therefore particularly excited to be here today to lend our support to this important South-South initiative between Brazil and the African continent.

I believe that this seminar, today and over the next two days, is an excellent example of concrete willingness to work together in partnership to further the global goal of sustainable energy development in Africa.

Africa faces many challenges when it comes to ensuring access to sustainable and affordable energy services for all, but the continent also offers great opportunities in particular when it comes to bioenergy development. With its vast land and biomass resources, Africa has the opportunity to develop sustainable and competitive bioenergy for domestic use and export. Africa still depends predominantly on traditional bioenergy for basic energy services. The challenge in Africa is to move away from traditional bioenergy with its limitations and negative impacts on the environment and human health towards modern bioenergy, which provides significant opportunities for sustainable development in Africa.

Modern bioenergy, in fact, is a clean source of energy and contribute to sustainable development. As a low carbon or carbon-neutral source of energy, bioenergy can contribute to climate change mitigation by contributing to replace fossil fuels and through carbon sequestration in plants and soils in perennial energy plantations. Furthermore, perennial bioenergy cropping systems can help stabilise soils and reduce land degradation. Bioenergy feedstocks also present an opportunity for diversification of agricultural production at the large and small-scale levels.

Biofuels production and use is increasing inexorably all over the world and, although priorities may vary, its reasons are shared by most countries:

- first of all, **rising oil prices** and the concentration of supply force countries to look for alternative fuels and to diversify energy suppliers;
- secondly, biofuels can play a role in **rural development**, providing energy access to remote communities and creating new employment;
- last but certainly not least, **climate change**, is one of the main driving forces to replace fossil energy sources and to mitigate CO₂ emissions.

However, we are aware that a fast growth in bioenergy demand and supply, could also bear some risks. Rising demand for bioenergy has already caused a surge in the use of grain and other food crops for energy, pushing up the price of staple foods and affecting food security. Bioenergy also poses environmental challenges, for instance where increasing monocropping practices and greater fertiliser and pesticide use may jeopardise water and soil quality over time, and threaten biodiversity.

In this respect, we consider sustainability a key element and it is wise to put in place the necessary safeguards to ensure sustainable management of the entire production chain – feedstock production, processing and use of biofuels. Therefore, life cycle analysis, labelling and “certification of origin” of biofuels should be agreed internationally and introduced into the global energy market.

Labeling and certification should be used to ensure sustainable development, environmental gains and to promote social equity. At the same time, sustainability criteria should not represent way to the introduction of un-necessary trade barriers and protectionism against developing countries export opportunities.

In autumn 2007, the Global Bioenergy Partnership will issue its first official report, providing an overview of current bioenergy policies, data and best practices in G8 +5 countries. The report will include an overview of the current policy framework governing sustainability concerns in bioenergy development. This overview should not only help Partners identify where there is common ground in policy priorities and concerns and where there are opportunities for international cooperation, but should also provide an important summary of the “state of play” in some of the largest markets for bioenergy.

Let me conclude by saying that the Global Bioenergy Partnership is looking forward to welcome Tanzania as the first African country to join the Partnership, and I am confident that this seminar could be the opportunity to strengthen GBEP cooperation in Africa.

Italy, as Chair of the Global Bioenergy Partnership, together with its Partners, is ready to promote pilot projects on bioenergy, in cooperation with African Countries.

I wish you a fruitful and successful seminar.

Thank you.