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Debate on Food Security

This has been an excellent debate, with knowledgeable and insightful contributions from across the political spectrum. I congratulate John Scott on the motion, which was excellent.

I hope that my congratulations do not damage his political career, but I liked the stress on the international aspects of the issue.

We have all seen the images of this global problem. Keith Brown was quite right to talk about the incident in Haiti, in which four people were killed in food riots.

In Italy, mothers have marched against the increase in the price of pasta and, in Bolivia, there have been violent protests against the doubling of food prices.

The World Bank has forecast that 100 million people are facing starvation.

What has caused the crisis?

Many members have speculated about that, suggesting reasons such as climate change, dietary change in China, global overpopulation, biofuels and even the credit crisis, which has brought about speculation in commodities futures following the collapse of the financial derivatives market.

Do we now need, as the World Bank and the United Nations have said, a new deal for food?

A recent *Economist* editorial said:

"Agriculture is now in limbo. The world of cheap food has gone. With luck and good policy, there will be a new equilibrium."

What can be done on the international stage?

A number of members, such as Rob Gibson and Peter Peacock, have come up with innovative suggestions.

However, it is clear that we need to refinance the World Food Programme, which is the world's largest distributor of food aid—the barrier between hungry people, such as those families in the developing world who exist on a dollar a day, and starvation.

The purchasing power of the World Food Programme has been slashed because of the rising cost of grain

To distribute the same amount of food this year as was distributed last year would cost an extra \$700 million.

Oxfam has argued that we need to act earlier.

For example, in 2004 and 2005, early warnings alerted the world's donors that Niger needed aid in order to avert famine, but delays and inaction caused the death of thousands of children.

As many have said today, we need to reassess the mandatory biofuel targets and highlight more responsible and sustainable policies.

We must be careful about taking agricultural land out of production.

John Scott gave a good speech.

Like others, I liked his analogy about the perfect storm and his encouragement of farmers to grow more food in sustainable ways and consumers to waste less food.

I particularly liked his quote about digging for victory, which was relevant—clearly, he has been watching his Winston Churchill tapes again over the weekend.

Karen Gillon spoke well about the need for farming across the world to be done sustainably.

The stress on climate change is important.

I do not have time to touch on a number of speakers' comments, but I thought that Mike Russell gave a well-made speech.

His promotion—albeit temporary—is well deserved.

I am sure that, like me, he will be supporting Labour's plans to extend paternity leave in the United Kingdom.

At the end of 2006, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs published an interesting report on food security.

It said that the real issues extend beyond the UK, beyond agriculture and beyond food, and that food security cannot be the object of a single policy, but needs to be supported by a range of cross-cutting strategies, such as strengthening energy security, developing international research and development and looking into the impact of climate change on global food potential.

Food security is an international issue.

The developed world can play a key leadership role in refinancing the World Food Programme and advocating fair trade and aid, and can light a candle to snuff out the darkness of hunger, malnutrition and death in the developing world.

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