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News Release

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HILARY BENN CALLS FOR GLOBAL AGREEMENT TO SECURE THE FUTURE OF OUR FOOD AS HE APPOINTS COUNCIL TO ADVISE ON UK FOOD STRATEGY

The world needs a new agreement to secure the future of our food to meet the twin challenges of starvation and climate change, Environment Secretary Hilary Benn will say tonight.

In a speech on food security to the Fabian Society Hilary Benn will say:

“By 2050 there will be nine billion of us living on this small and fragile planet. And the question is: do we have the capacity to feed the equivalent of another two Chinas?”

“Global food production will need to double just to meet demand. We have the knowledge and the technology to do this, as things stand, but the perfect storm of climate change, environmental degradation and water and oil scarcity, threatens our ability to succeed.”

And as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation warns that recent food price rises have pushed an additional 40 million people towards starvation, Hilary Benn will warn:

“As a world, we need to own up to the true scale of the problem. And we need a long-term plan for dealing with it.

“The single most important step we can take is to agree a new climate deal in Copenhagen next year. And my message to all those gathering in Poznan this week to lay the foundations of that agreement is that we need it, not just to secure our climate, but also to secure our food and water for the future.

“But even a climate deal can’t deal with all of this. Take the new Klondike land rush we are seeing right now in Africa. Is this the right way to ensure a fair distribution of such a precious resource? Will these deals be fair to the countries involved? What about countries that can’t afford to ‘buy’ more land?”

“Or take export bans, or failures in distribution, or unfair markets. All of these things require action globally, and a new approach.

“We need to look at how we can build on the work of the World Food Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and others to create a kind of new Kyoto – a global agreement to secure the future of our food.”

Hilary Benn’s call for action came as he announced the members of a new high level group to advise on all aspects of food policy.

Chaired by Dame Suzi Leather, the membership of the Council of Food Policy Advisors represents expertise in every aspect of our food system.

The group will advise on issues ranging from production to retail, and from regulation and distribution to consumption, as well as on securing the UK’s food supply, the affordability of food and the industry’s environmental impact

Announcing the membership of the Council, Hilary Benn said:

“We need to ensure that our food supply in future continues to be secure and sustainable. That’s why I’ve set up this new team of advisers who will look at food from farm to fork.

“The members of the Council provide experience from right across the food chain, including farming, retail, community food initiatives, and consumer groups.

“The Council will look at food prices, obesity and health, the environmental impact of food, and links to the wider economy, as well as providing a forum in which all food issues can be looked at together.

“Reporting directly to me, the Council will also work closely with the Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency.”

Dame Suzi Leather, who will chair the Council said:

“I’m looking forward to working with the other members of the Council of Food Policy Advisers to examine the practical solutions needed to maintain UK and global food security and the long term sustainability of the food chain.

“Our role will be to provide rapid advice and recommendations on key policy issues over the next two years. I do not anticipate producing weighty reports that sit unread on shelves but rather practical solutions and ongoing counsel for Government.

“We expect to meet monthly, usually in London, and also carry out regular fact finding visits around the UK or hold regional meetings.”

Notes to editors:

1. The members of the Council of Food Policy Advisers announced today are:

Dame Suzi Leather (Chair)
Sir Don Curry
Sue Davies, MBE
Professor Elizabeth Dowler
Professor Gareth Edwards-Jones
Iain Ferguson, CBE
Paul Kelly
Professor Tim Lang
Guy McCracken
Claire Pritchard
Dame Fiona Reynolds
Geetie Singh
Tim Smith
Stefan Tangermann

Further appointments are still to be made – details will be announced shortly.

2. All members have been appointed to the Council of Food Policy Advisers in a personal capacity, not as representatives of any sector, company, or organisation.
3. Biographies

Dame Suzi Leather

Dame Suzi Leather is Chair of the Charity Commission and most recently before this she was Chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, and the School Food

Trust. Previously Suzi chaired the Exeter and District Community NHS Trust as well as the Health Forum, designed to promote the public health agenda in the local area.

She was the first Deputy Chair of the Food Standards Agency and a member of the Royal Society's Inquiry into Infectious Diseases of Livestock. In the 2006 New Year's Honours list she was made a Dame of the British Empire.

Suzi has an extensive academic background in political sciences, social work and probation. Her particular interests include food policy, nutrition and poverty, the needs of low-income consumers and the impact of European policies on UK consumers.

Sir Don Curry

Sir Don Curry chaired the Policy Commission on the 'Future of Farming and Food' which reported to Government in January 2002. Government policy is now based on the report's recommendations and Sir Don is currently chairing a Delivery Group with responsibility for driving forward the Government's 'Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy'. Sir Don is Chairman of the NFU Mutual Insurance Company and a former Crown Estate Commissioner. He chaired the Meat and Livestock Commission from 1993-2001. He also farms 440 acres in Northumberland comprising arable and lowland grass.

He was awarded a CBE for his services to Agriculture in the 1997 New Year's Honours list and a Knighthood in the Birthday Honours in 2001. He has been awarded honorary doctorates by Cranfield, Gloucestershire, and Newcastle University.

Sue Davies, MBE

Sue is Chief Policy Adviser for Which?. She has represented consumer interests in food policy debates at national and international level, and was awarded an MBE for services to food safety in 2003 in recognition of her contribution to food policy. Sue is also Trustee of the Caroline Walker Trust.

Professor Elizabeth Dowler

Elizabeth is Professor of Food and Social Policy in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick. Her recent research has focused on the role of food and nutrition in mediating inequalities in health, in defining and measuring poverty, and in evaluating policy interventions at local and national levels, as well as on 'reconnected' relationships between consumers and producers. Elizabeth has worked with many different disciplines and sectors in the UK and internationally. She is a member of the Food Ethics Council and the UK National Heart Forum.

Professor Gareth Edwards-Jones

Gareth is Professor of Agriculture and Land Use at Bangor University. His research interests span a range of issues concerned with food production and wise use of the environment including: carbon accounting, agricultural policy and the environment, the economics of nature conservation, the psychology of farming decision-making and agricultural development in Wales. He is currently on the scientific advisory committee of Natural England and the Sustainable Agriculture Panel of BBSRC (Biological and Biotechnology Research Council).

Iain Ferguson, CBE

Iain Ferguson has been Chief Executive of Tate & Lyle PLC since May 2003. Iain is active in a number of key industry groups. He is the current President of the Food & Drink Federation, and is Past President of the Institute of Grocery Distribution. He is also Honorary Vice President of the British Nutrition Foundation. In the June 2003 Queen's Birthday Honours List, Iain was awarded a CBE for services to the food industry.

Paul Kelly

Paul Kelly has nearly 20 years experience of working in different parts of the food industry and in contributing to public policy development. He has a passionate interest in food and a unique insight into the challenge of how we put the safest, highest quality food on the nation's plate at a price everyone can afford but with the minimum impact on the environment. Paul chairs Business in the Community's Plough to Plate project. He was a member of the School Meals Review Panel and is a board member of the School Food Trust.

Since August 2007 he has been Corporate Affairs Director for ASDA Stores. He is Chair of the ASDA Foundation, a Director of the British Retail Consortium and a member of the Yorkshire & Humber Business Leaders Environment Group. Prior to joining ASDA he was Group Corporate Affairs Director for Compass Group PLC with responsibility for communication, government and regulatory policy, corporate responsibility and food & nutrition policy.

Professor Tim Lang

Tim Lang is Professor of Food Policy at City University's Centre for Food Policy in London. In 2006, he was appointed Natural Resources and Land Use Commissioner on the UK Government's Sustainable Development Commission. He has been a regular adviser/consultant to the World Health Organisation at global and European levels, and has been a special advisor to House of Commons Select Committee inquiries. He chaired the Scottish NHS Executive's Scottish Diet Action Plan Review in 2005-06, and worked with the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) 'Food Supply in the 21st Century' programme, 2005-08. He is Vice President of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and a Fellow of the Faculty of Public Health.

Guy McCracken

Guy has recently retired as Chief Executive of Food Retail for the Co-operative Group. During his career with the Co-operative Group and other organisations, Guy has developed extensive knowledge of the supply base both in food manufacturing and agriculture, tackling issues such as safety, quality, continuity of supply and product development.

Claire Pritchard

Claire is Strategic Project Manager for food and health at the Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency (GCDA). She has experience of establishing and running community food projects and food-related social enterprises including food growing, community cookery clubs, catering, and food access projects. Claire is a member of the London Food Board, Sustain's London Food Link Steering Group

Dame Fiona Reynolds

Dame Fiona Reynolds is Director General of the National Trust for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and has championed and developed the Trust's work on sustainable food. Before arriving at the Trust, Dame Fiona had a long career in the voluntary conservation movement. Fiona was appointed a DBE in 2008, for services to heritage and conservation.

Geetie Singh

Geetie Singh is Managing Director and founder of Sloeberry Trading Ltd, which operates the Duke of Cambridge organic pub. Geetie set up the Duke of Cambridge in 1998 to be the UK's first organic gastropub. She currently holds a number of positions including Chair of the 'Catering Certification Standards Committee' with The Soil Association; member of the London Food Board; advisory board member of 'Good Catch' which aims to help chefs and restaurateurs find practical solutions to sourcing sustainable seafood; and board member of People Tree Foundation, a Fair Trade fashion retailer.

Tim Smith

Tim Smith took up post as Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency on 1 April 2008. Tim is the former Chief Executive of Arla Foods UK plc. The company, which is responsible for a number of major food brands, is now part of Arla Foods amba, Europe's largest dairy manufacturer. He was appointed Chief Executive of Arla Foods in early 2005. Tim Smith graduated from Leeds University with a degree in microbiology and zoology. He has spent his entire career in the food business: from 1979 to 1994 he was at Northern Foods, finishing his career there as a Divisional Director. After five years at Sara Lee Corporation, where he was President of UK operations, he joined Express Dairies plc as Executive Director. Express Dairies merged with Arla Foods in October 2003.

Stefan Tangermann

Stefan has recently retired from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) where he was Director for Trade and Agriculture. Before joining the OECD, he was Professor of Economics and Agricultural Economics for 25 years. His academic work has concentrated, among other topics, on the need and options for reforming agricultural policies in OECD countries, and on strengthening the rules for agricultural trade.

4. As the Council is a short term advisory body that is anticipated to exist for fewer than 24 months, there are no formal requirements for the appointments process. If, when the Council is reviewed after 18 months, it is decided that a more permanent body is required, a formal appointments process will be followed.
5. The Council of Food Policy Advisors has been set up to:
 - Provide advice on how to achieve sustainable production, distribution and consumption of food, ensuring that it is available and affordable for all sectors of society;
 - Consider the effects of global trends on the above;
 - Advise the Secretary of State on how to achieve the four objectives for food policy set out in the Strategy Unit's report [Food Matters: Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century](#); and
 - Make practical policy recommendations.
6. For more details go to www.defra.gov.uk/foodrin/policy/council/

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