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G-8 Ag Ministers' Support for Free Trade and Biotech Undermine Progress to Eradicate Hunger

Minneapolis/Rome – At the first ever G-8 Farm Summit in Treviso, Italy, agriculture ministers pledged earlier this week to work toward alleviating poverty and hunger and to encourage sustainable food production.

"Close to one billion people are currently suffering from hunger around the world and the G-8 has a role to play in promoting comprehensive solutions," said Alexandra Spieldoch, Director of IATP's Trade and Global Governance program. "But this weekend, the G-8 failed to shift course from economic policies that have undermined the food security of many developing countries."

In a more positive light, the G-8 ministers recognized the need for a multi-stakeholder response to the food crisis and a strengthened UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). They supported the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis as a coordinating body chaired by the UN Secretary General and the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA). The ministers also called for more efforts to monitor speculation and to manage food stocks as a means to deal with humanitarian crises and price volatility. But, their language was weak and ambiguous in terms of next steps at a time when the global food challenge requires urgent action.

The G-8 is pushing for an overall increase of global food production as a response to the food crisis. During the Summit, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack stated that increased productivity, particularly helped by biotechnology, would reduce hunger and address social instability. Ministers recommended more efficient agri-food chains and more open markets, as well as an "ambitious conclusion of the Doha Round." A focus on trade liberalization sadly ignores a right-to-food agenda that prioritizes the role of small farmers (including women), improved access to food and climate-friendly agriculture. Developing infrastructure and resilient food systems, not more food production, is what is most needed in this time of crisis.

"The G-8 did not entirely miss their political moment, nor did they capture it," said Spieldoch, at IATP. "The G-8 must invest in an entirely new global model for food and agriculture—one that is housed at the UN, and one that will truly lead to eradicating hunger and poverty. This is the task at hand."

IATP works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems.