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World food crisis at heart of UN chief's outreach in Geneva

By Peter Capella

Lausanne - 29 April 2008 | 10:00

UN chief Ban Ki-moon kicks off a new public lecture series on Tuesday which is meant to build a bridge between the world body and the local community in Geneva. His theme -- the UN's poverty cutting targets -- coincides with the world body's urgent appeal for 2.5 billion dollars to tackle a global food crisis.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appealed for 2.5 billion dollars to tackle a growing food crisis on Tuesday after a meeting of UN agency chiefs in Berne. Cereals and rice harvests in Asia have dropped sharply in recent months, prompting a halt to exports by some major producing countries, sharp price rises on commodity markets that have hit the most impoverished in Asia and Africa above all.

The crisis is a severe setback to the UN's poverty cutting targets, the Millennium Development Goals, the focal point of Ban's presentation in Geneva on Tuesday. The targets pledged by the UN's 192 member states in 2000 include halving extreme poverty and world hunger by 2015. The new lecture series organised by the UN's institute for training and research (UNITAR) is aimed at bringing across such crucial issues to the general public directly and in simple terms, said UN spokeswoman Marie Heuzé.

"There is a difficulty to communicate with the community in Geneva about what the agencies do," she added. "It's important that we explain and respond to questions that appear ordinary, but which are the questions of the general public."

More public question and answer sessions with key global figures are due to be held in The Geneva Lectures from late summer.

The UN Secretary General's lecture at the Palais des Nations in Geneva at 4pm on Tuesday April 29 will be webcast on <http://www.un.org/webcast/>. No places are left in the conference hall.