

Medvedev slams biofuel producers at grain summit

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Russian President Dmitry Medvedev speaks during the World Grain Forum in St. Petersburg. Medvedev on Saturday urged countries to switch to non-food sources of biofuel to prevent the spread of hunger in a world where every sixth person is malnourished.

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"We are advocating production of [biofuel](#) from other, non-food sources," Medvedev said in a speech inaugurating the launch of a global grain summit in his native Saint Petersburg.

"The development of bioenergy should not become a reason for a growing deficit of grain for food needs," he said, adding there were countries that still did not realize the importance of eradicating hunger.

His comments appeared to be a thinly veiled attack on the United States, Brazil and the European Union which are among the leading producers of biofuel.

"Many today have simply resigned themselves to the fact that a child dies from hunger every five seconds in the world," Medvedev said.

Starvation in a world where nearly one billion people go hungry is "the most difficult trial for mankind," Medvedev said, expressing hope that the grain summit attended by top food officials would help tackle the problem.

Medvedev first proposed holding the grain summit during a Group of Eight summit in Toyako, Japan last year.

Medvedev said Russia was concerned about an imbalance between grain supply and demand, adding nations should agree on mechanisms to keep this in check and set up an "early warning" system to monitor grain markets in the future.

"We intend to strengthen positions on the world grain market (and) support this direction both financially and organizationally," he said.

Russia now is getting ready to begin cultivation of 20 million hectares (49.5 million acres) of farmland that have not been used since the start of market reforms in the 1990s, he added.

The head of Russia's largest lender Sberbank, German Gref, who took the floor after Medvedev, said food security issues were "more important than currency problems."

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) says the number of starving people in the world will increase drastically because of the economic crisis.

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