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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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Statement by the spokesperson for the Parliamentary Front against Hunger

Please send any questions about this document to:

Regional Conference Secretariat

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Speech by the

Delegate Jairo Flores, Regional Coordinator of the Parliamentary Front against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean

1. We are here today, as members of the executive, of civil society, of international bodies, of private enterprise and, of course, of parliaments, which is the body that I represent.
2. The 36th session of the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean calls on us to come together and devise a new working strategy that will enable us to achieve a healthier, fairer and more inclusive region: free from hunger and malnutrition, one in which no one is left behind.
3. We are facing a devastating landscape as a result of the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only will we not be reaching the targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), specifically SDG 2 “Zero Hunger”, but the malnutrition figures are likely to be far worse than when the countries made the commitment to the 2030 Agenda.
4. In Latin America and the Caribbean, hunger has increased in the last five years, affecting 47 million people in 2019. If this continues, the predictions are that nearly 67 million people will suffer from hunger by 2030.
5. It is worth highlighting that these figures do not consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the United Nations has predicted that Latin America and the Caribbean will now

¹ Previously scheduled for 27 to 29 April 2020 in Managua (Nicaragua).

face its worst recession in one hundred years, with a fall in the region's gross domestic product of 9.1 percent in 2020, which will probably lead to a significant rise in poverty and malnutrition.

6. While we very much appreciate having contributed to the results of the FAO 2018–2019 biennium, we hope in the next one to draw lessons from these ten years of collective efforts by the parliaments of the region and FAO through the Parliamentary Front against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean (PFH-LAC), and to redouble our efforts to work together to address the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in food and agriculture.

7. We must urgently place SDG 2 at the heart of the region's political agendas and start a debate on the need for medium and long-term structural transformation.

8. It is important that these discussions develop into state policies that will allow us to avoid the dramatic forecasts of SDG 2 and promote a transition towards healthy, sustainable and inclusive food systems.

9. The PFH-LAC is a diverse and permanent network with a presence in 21 national parliaments and four regional and/or sub-regional parliaments; we are confident that gender equality, women's empowerment and the inclusion of the knowledge of indigenous peoples will be key to this process of transforming food systems.

10. We welcome the documents presented at the Regional Conference and believe that the new guidelines for FAO work over the next two years provide a comprehensive overview of the 2030 Agenda SDGs and will undoubtedly help to address the challenges of SDG 2.

11. We particularly welcome the “Hand-in-Hand” initiative promoted by the FAO Director-General. We pledge to support this commitment, in recognition of the role it can play in strengthening national ownership and the capacity to speed up progress, and thus end poverty and hunger, as well as promoting rural development and economic growth in the region.

12. We also back the FAO recommendations to the Regional Conference, in particular those that recognize the need to strengthen policies, regulations and institutional frameworks to transform food systems into healthy and sustainable ones, and achieve more prosperous and inclusive rural societies, prioritizing the most vulnerable regions and populations.

13. We concur with the need voiced by FAO to rebuild and transform food systems using innovative approaches, in which digitalization, technology transfer, integrated information systems, increased responsible investment in food and agriculture and multi-stakeholder partnerships will all be key elements in generating policy proposals.

14. To achieve this, we agree that it is important to strengthen partnerships with the private sector, small producers and food companies, food suppliers and consumers.

15. On this last point, we recommend that, through the PFH-LAC, academia and parliaments are also expressly included as stakeholders who can make a significant contribution to ensuring that policies on hunger and malnutrition become a matter for the state, thus enabling a transformative post-COVID-19 recovery in the region.

16. The PFH-LAC has experience of working with the executive branch and the above-mentioned social partners.

17. As you know, parliaments not only bring issues to the table, placing them on the political agenda, but they also develop legislation or approve budgets. Furthermore, we work with the executive branch, civil society and other social partners to conduct political monitoring, constructively seeking to ensure that the legislation has an impact, especially on the most vulnerable territories and population groups.

18. These roles are therefore essential if we consider that resources will be scarce, and the state will have to aim to be more efficient and strengthen accountability.

19. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we at the PFH-LAC have therefore prioritized steps taken to ensure the health crisis does not become a food crisis, such as approving legislation that protects the

food chains from disruption, focusing our support on family farming and on the operation of the supply chain, monitoring school meal programmes to ensure they run smoothly and approving budgets to tackle the emergency, taking action for the most vulnerable members of society.

20. By way of example, at the national level, I can highlight the following legislation or bills that were promoted or that reported progress during their passage: the School Food Act in Ecuador, the Public Procurement of Family Farming Act in Colombia, a draft law on family farming in Guatemala (now on its second reading) and a draft law on reducing food waste and loss and waste in Chile.

21. In terms of political scrutiny, the members of the Parliamentary Front have requested reports from the executive on the state of food security and the results of the measures taken. Some national examples include a call from the PFH of Guatemala, an open letter to the President of the Republic of Chile, a letter to the President of the Republic of Colombia and a call from the PFH of Honduras.

22. At the regional level, important policy position work was carried out on the urgency of addressing SDG 2 in the context of the pandemic. In March 2020, the PFH-LAC therefore published an open letter, which was covered by the main media outlets in the region, to foster a timely response to the impact of COVID-19 on food and agriculture. The work was supported by the PFH-LAC regional and/or sub-regional chapters.

23. It is also worth mentioning that the Parliament of Latin America and the Caribbean (PARLATINO) drafted and implemented a work plan on SDG 2 in the context of COVID-19, carrying out important work such as issuing a statement on family farming and on the need to increase responsible investments in agriculture and food, both in the context of COVID-19. Progress was also made with Mexico's presentation to PARLATINO of a model law on community water and sanitation systems, and the approval of a proposed model law on climate change and food and nutritional security by the Commissions on Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, and Environment and Tourism, the result of collaborative work carried out with FAO and UN Environment.

24. Moreover, we highlight the importance of strengthening parliamentary alliances and sharing experiences on SDG 2 at a global level. To that end, in 2018 the PFH-LAC led the First Parliamentary World Summit against Hunger and Malnutrition held in Spain, and we are now working with PARLATINO to advance the SDG 2 agenda with the help of the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EUROLAT).

25. We are also working with the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) to create an Ibero-American Parliamentary Alliance.

26. We believe it is important that parliaments should also be present in other significant international forums, such as at the next meeting of the Committee on World Food Security and the UN Food Systems Summit focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals, to be held in 2021. We therefore ask FAO to support and take steps towards achieving these goals.

27. Similarly, we must argue that it will be crucial for parliaments to support international political commitments to the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition and the UN Decade of Family Farming, by implementing agreements with our partners: the World Rural Forum, Consumers International, the Right to Food Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (RFO-LAC) and others.

28. We emphasize that parliaments will need more technical assistance and new skills for all this work. We therefore request that, in its next global strategic framework, FAO explicitly identifies parliaments as another government player that must be included in the technical assistance processes towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.

29. To conclude, we at the PFH-LAC would like this FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean to know that they can count on all our political capital and experience to develop the three regional initiatives and the 2030 Agenda, working with executives, civil society, private enterprise and other representatives in society to achieve a Zero Hunger region by 2030.

30. Finally, we are grateful for the technical support provided by FAO to the PFH-LAC, both by its national representations and the Regional Office, and in conjunction with Spanish Cooperation and the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation through the “Mesoamerica Hunger Free AMEXCID-FAO” programme, which supports our daily fight for a Zero Hunger region.

31. We are certain that, if we unite everyone present here today behind this cause, through ongoing and respectful dialogue, together we can achieve a transformative recovery of our food systems, one in which no one is left behind.

32. You can count on the PFH-LAC, on our willingness, our commitment and our work towards achieving that goal.