

**SPEECH TO BE DELIVERED, ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY, BY
HIS EXCELLENCY BHARRAT JAGDEO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
GUYANA ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON FOOD SECURITY –
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Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director General of the FAO

Heads of State and Government

Distinguished Invitees

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning,

My Colleagues who have spoken before me have already touched on many of the critical issues of concern to the Global Community as it relates to food insecurity. There has been a tremendous amount of work done by international organisations such as the FAO in analysing the causes of food insecurity and hunger in developing countries. What we need to accomplish is a plan of action to address these issues that will have tangible results.

The Draft Declaration is a good example of the hard work that went into preparing for this Summit. There is nothing new that I can add to this technical work. In our deliberations, we can share experiences with how we are dealing with food insecurity in our respective countries. However, we must be careful that we are not stuck in a descriptive mode where we over diagnose the problem and we repeat *ad naseum* the likely solutions without a strategy for achieving our objectives.

We continuously call on the developed world to help solve our problems and we lament the fact that their Leaders are not here. However, we should not rely solely on the developed world for solutions to our challenges. If we continue on this path we will not achieve the results that we want. We cannot rely on the benevolence of developed countries to keep their promises on providing Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), or to reverse the decline of such assistance.

We have to move to a different mode. We should discuss what we need to do. We need an effective public awareness campaign that will convey the erudite message, reflected in the Declaration, directly to the people.

In my eleven years as President, I have spoken to many World Leaders in the Developed World and most times they say to me:

“We would like to provide greater financial assistance to the developing world but there is no political will in my country; it’s not a popular political issue; people are concerned that we are providing international assistance while there are domestic issues to be addressed”.

I think some of these concerns are genuine and I think sometimes they are used as excuses for not providing more resources. Therefore we need to create the atmosphere in those countries that would be supportive to the Leaders of the developed world who genuinely want to contribute to the solution. For those who are willing but are not to live up to their commitment, we must develop a campaign to convince them.

When we leave this Summit, the mainstream media will give us five minutes on prime time television, if we are lucky and if no other disaster strikes before we leave this building. Very few people around the world will be made aware of the outcomes of the Summit. But, the general public who are fed on a diet by the mass media would think that all that goes on in the developing countries is corruption, famine, disaster and ethnic cleansing. There is never anything positive about developing countries in the news. Why do you think the people in the Developed World would want their Governments to provide assistance to us when all they see is the corruption that the mainstream media paints of us? There is no positive counterpart to that story; and we sometimes form our opinions of each other based on what is stated in the mainstream media. How do we get the people in the developed countries say positive things about us to their Leaders and encourage them to assist us?

How do we make the people say to their Government:

“Climate Change is important and we want you to agree to deepen emission cuts and agree to financing to allow the developing countries to provide environmental services in exchange for support to sustainable development”.

How do we get them to say “*provide enough funds*” so by 2025 we can eliminate hunger? I know that it might seem unrealistic but we can achieve that goal earlier.

Before I conclude, I would like to highlight a concern that we have in the Caribbean. We were seduced by the importation of cheap food so we paid less attention to our food security. From feeding ourselves we went to importing \$4 billion of food. However, the escalating food prices put food security at the forefront of our Agenda. In 2007, the CARICOM Heads of Governments met in a special session to address the food crisis.

We have a regional plan, which has identified the key binding constraints to the further development of the agricultural sector in the community. We are collectively developing Strategies for alleviating these constraints. Director General, on behalf of the Caribbean Community, I want to thank you for the assistance provided by the FAO to the fifteen member countries of the Region. We will continue to require support for some time to come to overcome these constraints. Sometimes the relatively higher GDP of our Region compared to some other developing countries masks the reality of significant pockets of poverty and undernourishment in our Community. They mask our vulnerability to natural disasters and the high level of indebtedness.

Our situation in the Region is exacerbated *inter alia* by the characteristics which define some or all of our economies. For example many of us are Small Island and Low Lying Coastal Developing States. We all have small vulnerable economies given to income volatility. Some of us are highly indebted middle income countries. Our economic vulnerability includes *inter alia*, a high degree of openness, diseconomies of size and scope, dependence on a few economic activities, limited natural resources, a predisposition and vulnerability to natural disasters and external economic shocks, and our difficulty in securing special and differential treatment at the multilateral and other fora. The combination of all these traits makes our countries particularly vulnerable to food insecurity.

The current proposal of the FAO with regards to the re-categorization or graduation of some CARICOM Member States could result in some of our countries receiving Technical Cooperation Programmes on a cost recovery basis rather than on a full grant basis. This would result in a diminishing of our ability to address the main challenges in our agriculture development and in achieving food and nutrition security.

In closing, we have to make agriculture a greater priority in our countries. We need to allocate greater resources in our national budgets for agriculture development, for drainage and irrigation, for farm access roads, and for other infrastructure. We need to be more proactive for mobilising resources for our agriculture and rural development. We must not limit ourselves only for requesting grants from multilateral agencies for agriculture. We must also consider innovative ways of attracting investments to this productive sector.

Thank you very much.