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منظمة  
الغذية والزراعة  
للأمم المتحدة

# FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

## Thirty-fifth Session

Montego Bay, Jamaica, 5-8 March 2018

## Statement by the Director-General

Esteemed Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates and guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to address you in the opening of the 35th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean.

I deeply thank the Government of Jamaica for their great hospitality and dedication in the organization of this regional meeting.

I extend my thanks to all GRULAC countries for your constant support for my work as FAO Director-General.

And I would also take this opportunity to express my support and condolences to those countries that have been hit hard by natural disasters in recent months, such as the earthquake that ravaged Mexico, and the hurricanes that devastated vast territories in the Caribbean and Central America.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During the last Regional Conference, two years ago in Mexico, we celebrated one important achievement. In 2015, the region had reached the two goals of reducing hunger:

- first, the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of hungry people in relation to the levels of 1990;

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- and second, the goal of the 1996 World Food Summit of halving the absolute number of hungry people of 1990.

It was a hard won victory. The result of a sustained effort based on the highest political commitment to fight hunger.

It was based on the implementation of more inclusive social, economic and productive policies; and on legal frameworks and governance systems that are necessary to promote food security.

But recently we have seen a disturbing change in the numbers on hunger.

The prevalence of undernourishment in the world increased in 2016.

This includes here in Latin America and the Caribbean from 40 million to 42.5 million people.

So it is time to take stock of the progress made so far; identify the reasons for this setback; and draw conclusions on how to move forward to make sure that hunger goes down again.

This is fundamental to achieve the CELAC commitment of reaching zero hunger by 2025.

And also the global commitment of eliminating hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030, the Sustainable Development Goal number 2 (SDG 2).

Let me highlight this loud and clear: eradicating hunger must not be our only concern.

SDG 2 calls for the eradication of all forms of malnutrition.

Today we are facing a global epidemic of overweight and obesity.

Numbers are increasing in most developing and developed countries alike.

In 2016, more than 1.9 billion adults worldwide were overweight. Of these, more than 650 million were obese.

The situation is also very worrying here in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The rate of overweight children under five years of age is about 7 percent, exceeding the world average.

Obesity has increased in all age groups. In 24 countries of the region, about 20 percent of the adult population is obese. This is alarming.

FAO wants to promote a comprehensive and extensive debate with countries, civil society and the private sector, and exchange ideas on the best way to tackle all forms of malnutrition.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

[Allow me to continue in Spanish.]

To tackle the various forms of malnutrition, we need to bring about a true transformation of food systems.

We need to make systems genuinely sustainable to ensure that food is produced, marketed, handled and consumed in a way that ensures a truly nutritious diet.

In Chile, for example, FAO has supported the Government in preparing its food labelling law. This law has sparked the interest of a number of other countries around the world.

It is also essential for consumers to replace highly processed foods with fresh local produce.

That is why we promoted the International Year of Quinoa in 2013 and the International Year of Pulses in 2016 and are now enthusiastically supporting the proposal for an International Year of Fruit and Vegetables.

In addition, strengthening family farming helps to boost local development and local and regional economies.

In order to harness this potential more fully, targeted policies are required that aim specifically to help family farming to overcome current constraints.

To this end, FAO supported the establishment of the Central American and Dominican Republic commission on family farming and helped to revive the Andean dialogue group on family farming.

FAO maintains an intensive programme of partnering countries in the region.

Some examples are:

- a plan to promote family farming in Panama;
- the implementation of family farmer registries in Costa Rica and Guatemala;
- a strategy of technology-transfer for family farming of the Nicaraguan Institute of Agricultural Technology;
- strengthening more than 300 family farmers' organizations in Haiti through FAO field schools.

The Decade of Family Farming, which has recently been announced by the United Nations General Assembly, will allow us to increase our focus on this sector.

Linkages between social protection programmes and economic inclusion strategies are also key to reducing rural poverty and social inequality, especially among women, youth and indigenous peoples.

A prime example is the regional intersectoral agenda on social protection and productive inclusion that is currently being developed by the Central American countries and the Dominican Republic, with support from FAO and the Central American Social Integration Secretariat (SISCA).

Ladies and gentlemen,

Climate change is having a profound effect on agrifood systems.

It is crucial to promote adaptation to this changing climate, especially among poor rural communities.

This week, we hope to hear from all of you how FAO could help you better to plan and implement actions, as well as to mobilize financial support to build the resilience of rural livelihoods.

For example, in Central America and the Dominican Republic, we are working with the Central American Bank for Economic Integration and the Central American Integration System (SICA) to establish a regional programme to build the resilience of the Dry Corridor.

A valuable global source of funding is the Green Climate Fund.

FAO works closely with countries that have formally requested the Organization's assistance to submit projects to the Green Climate Fund.

I am pleased to announce that, last week, the Green Climate Fund approved a climate change mitigation and adaptation project worth US\$ 90 million, submitted by Paraguay with FAO technical support.

Another key issue relating to climate change is the preservation of biodiversity.

The latest meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Cancun (Mexico) in December 2017, recommended that FAO should act as a platform for mainstreaming biodiversity in all sectors of agriculture.

FAO's first activity relating to the new biodiversity mainstreaming platform will be to hold a short event in Rome to promote dialogue among all stakeholders.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The last FAO Conference in July 2017 was very important for further aligning FAO's work with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

FAO is conscious of the need for countries to develop their technical capabilities in order to provide data and statistics for SDG monitoring.

As you know, FAO is responsible for gathering information from 21 indicators and shares responsibility for a further 4 indicators.

We have heeded the mandate from our member countries and continue to promote processes of decentralization and modernization.

FAO is also talking to every country to identify the kind of support it needs, what kind of office best meets its needs and what presence and support FAO should provide.

In parallel with this process, we are promoting a number of new partnerships to ensure the mobilization of resources and to involve new partners in the fight against hunger.

Partnerships with the private sector, academia and our United Nations sister organizations are crucial if we are to progress towards compliance with the SDGs.

One example is the successful work carried out by the Parliamentary Fronts against Hunger.

Nineteen countries in the region now have a national front and we expect that number to keep growing until there is a parliamentary front in every country in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Something I wish to emphasize before concluding is that we must not be discouraged by the setback suffered in the fight against hunger in 2016.

While the large numbers are certainly a cause for concern, they mask achievements and strategies that will allow us to remain optimistic and to forge a path to a better future.

We have seen the plan for food security, nutrition and hunger eradication of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States bear its first fruits.

We have seen greater consumer awareness of food waste and greater commitment by member countries to food security.

We have also seen Colombia find a way to end decades of conflict, by making rural development the cornerstone of its peace process.

These are the things on which we must build. They are our strengths.

FAO remains convinced that hunger and malnutrition can be eradicated.

And that we can be the first zero-hunger generation.

Thank you very much for your attention.