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Продовольственная и
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Organización de las
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منظمة
الأغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Thirty-third Session

Santiago, Chile, 6 - 9 May 2014

Statement by the Director-General

Your Excellency Carlos Casamiquela, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of Argentina, and outgoing Chair of the FAO Regional Conference,

Your Excellency Carlos Furche, Minister of Agriculture of Chile and incoming Chair of the FAO Regional Conference,

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Permanent Representatives to FAO,

Representatives of civil society and the private sector,

Colleagues from FAO and other United Nations agencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Two years ago we met for our last Regional Conference in Buenos Aires soon after I had been appointed Director-General of the FAO.

I stand before you again today to report on what we have done to transform FAO, and to present our proposals for enhancing Latin American and Caribbean efforts to ensure food security and inclusive and sustainable development.

I wish to begin by placing FAO's transformation in the current context. A mere 600 days remain until the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Around 60 countries have already surpassed the target of Goal 1 to halve undernutrition.

Sixteen are in this region: Argentina, Barbados, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Uruguay.

Indeed, the target is well within the reach of Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole. Since 1990, the proportion of the region's undernourished population has fallen from 15 percent to 8 percent. Over the same period, the number of people in the region living with hunger has declined from 66 million to 47 million. The challenge now is to reduce that number to zero.

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In recent years, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have made major strides in strengthening the institutions, legal frameworks and governance systems needed to promote food security.

FAO has always been an ally in this government-led effort embraced by Latin American and Caribbean society.

The finest example of our joint effort is the Hunger-Free Latin America and Caribbean Initiative, launched in 2006 and endorsed by Heads of State and Government in 2009.

And the region continues to make progress.

In December 2014, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) and PetroCaribe approved the Action Plan for Eradication of Hunger and Poverty, supported by FAO and financed by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The action plan is yet another example of the region's burgeoning South-South cooperation. This week we shall have the opportunity to sign a new South-South cooperation agreement under which Mexico will support food security in Central America.

The eradication of hunger and extreme poverty is also a priority of the Plan of Action 2014 of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), with which FAO works closely.

These actions reinforce national policies, such as support for family farming and improved social protection, including cash transfers for the benefit of 20 percent of the region's population.

I wish to emphasize that linkages must be forged between the productive and social spheres, to ensure food security in a world and a region where the main cause of hunger is not insufficient production but lack of access.

I also want to highlight the role of family farmers, who preserve, recover and develop such traditional foods as quinoa and potatoes – commemorated in past international years – and are the leading food suppliers to the region's local markets.

However, despite their key role in food security, many family farmers are subsistence farmers and are vulnerable to hunger.

This sums up the potential and challenges faced by the sector, which is being commemorated in 2014 by the International Year of Family Farming and is one of the important issues that you will be discussing during this Regional Conference.

May I point out that, while hunger is the most perverse form of malnutrition, it is not the only one. Obesity is the most visible form and is also present in this region. Some of your countries are facing a dual burden of hunger and obesity.

It is the state's responsibility to encourage healthy eating, which calls for collective action involving the food, farming, health and many other sectors.

In November we shall have a unique opportunity to discuss this issue at the Second International Conference on Nutrition in Rome, to be held jointly by FAO and the World Health Organization. I should like to invite all countries in the region to participate in this important meeting at the highest possible level.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to continue in English.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To move towards food security and sustainable development we need to continue building, consolidating and increasing our ongoing efforts. And we need to be ready to respond to the new challenges in a world in constant transformation.

One major challenge is climate change. And it is intrinsically linked to food security.

We sent this clear message at Rio+20 when we said that there cannot be sustainable development while millions of people continue to be excluded from a dignified life because of hunger and extreme poverty.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has put climate change in the headlines with its Fifth Assessment Report, to which FAO contributed.

Let me point out four things that have come out.

First, the report confirms that the climate is already changing. That means we need to act now.

Second, the rural poor are particularly vulnerable. They have fewer means to react and they tend to live in marginal production areas where the impact of climate change in agriculture will be felt harder.

Third: climate change has the potential to reconfigure the planet's food production scenario.

The expected impacts in Latin America and the Caribbean show this clearly.

However, the increase in temperature and the decrease in rainfall could lower productivity in Central America, the Andean region and northeastern Brazil.

Water availability may diminish in Central America and in semi-arid and glacier-melt-dependent regions.

Sea-level rise and human activities in coastal and marine ecosystems threaten fish stocks, corals and mangroves, which is especially worrisome in the Caribbean.

Andean countries could see a decrease in dairy cattle, pig and chicken production and an increase in sheep production.

The regional impact will be varied. And although it is true that higher productivity could benefit some exporting countries, most poor households and net food buyers will suffer.

This brings me to my fourth and last point: today, the world produces enough food for its entire population, but climate change reintroduces an element of uncertainty. To ensure we have enough food tomorrow, we need to mitigate, adapt and shift to more sustainable food systems.

We have many concrete examples of how to do this. Land-use planning, improved irrigation, groundwater management, zero-till farming, crop diversification and recovery of traditional and indigenous farming systems are just a few of the options.

We have the means to respond to the climate change challenge. It is within our reach, but we need to act now. And if we don't, we will not succeed in eradicating hunger or develop sustainably.

FAO understands what is at stake. That is why climate change is an issue that cuts across all our strategic objectives.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me switch back to Spanish.

FAO must not stand still if it wishes to provide the kind of support you expect in order to: eradicate hunger and promote sustainable development; address the threat of climate change; keep pace with the ever faster speed with which transboundary diseases spread; cope with increasingly volatile food prices; and expand productive and social inclusion.

That is why we have been striving to transform the Organization over the past two years.

Allow me to point out a few examples of this renewal.

First: we completed the FAO reform.

Second: we are focusing our work. We now have five strategic objectives instead of more than ten.

Third: we approved a results-based programme of work and budget, designed to meet Members' demands on the basis of proposals made by countries in FAO Governing Bodies, including Regional Conferences.

Fourth: we are building our capacity in such key areas as social protection, in the realization that it is impossible to fight hunger solely by increasing production. And we are boosting our presence in the regions without compromising the quality of our technical and normative work.

Fifth: we proposed and you approved strategic partnerships with the private sector and civil society. We also continue to build collaboration with other international agencies. In this region, FAO's joint work with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is a prime example.

Sixth: we are promoting decentralization.

Changes in FAO also impact on the region. Let me give you a few examples.

The region's 27 Country Programming Frameworks have been developed or updated and already signed with governments.

FAO has built its capacity in Latin America and the Caribbean to meet more fully the demands identified by the last Regional Conference in Buenos Aires.

Eight Country Representative positions have been filled. We also upgraded FAO's offices in Guatemala and Paraguay to fully-fledged Representations, with strong support from the governments concerned and in line with demand from the last Regional Conference.

While it is true that FAO has achieved much in the past two years, there is still a long way to go.

And our biggest challenge is only just beginning: to implement FAO's new decentralized programme of work.

Three regional initiatives are planned to help transform FAO's vision into concrete results in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The first initiative comes under FAO Strategic Objective 1 (to contribute to food security) and will support the Hunger-Free Latin America and Caribbean Initiative.

It will work on formulating and implementing multisector policies and programmes and will support cooperation among the various stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector.

The second regional initiative will support family farming and rural territorial development, paying special attention to indigenous people and women.

The initiative has a dual link with Strategic Objective 3 (to reduce rural poverty) and Strategic Objective 5 (to increase resilience).

The initial focus will be on Bolivia, Guatemala and the Caribbean, especially Haiti, which has been considered a priority country for the region.

The third regional initiative seeks to improve food and feed systems in the Caribbean to enhance food security in the subregion.

This initiative is in line with the efforts of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and focuses on Strategic Objective 4 (to increase efficiency and inclusion in food systems).

Ladies and gentlemen,

Latin America and the Caribbean has become a global example for fighting hunger.

And I call upon the Ministers and Heads of Delegation at this Regional Conference to reaffirm the commitment made by Heads of State and Government under the Hunger-Free Latin America and Caribbean Initiative: to eradicate undernutrition from our countries by the year 2025.

Our efforts do not only impact on cold economic growth figures – they also have a human face. The face of every woman, man, boy or girl who overcomes hunger is a daily reminder that we can win this fight.

Eradicating hunger from the region may be the greatest legacy that this generation will leave to humanity and should be the main global priority of the post-2015 development agenda.

Not only will hunger eradication open up new horizons for the people of Latin America and the Caribbean, it will become a source of hope for the rest of the world.

As Director-General of FAO, I am convinced that eradication is possible and invite you to join us on the path to achieving it.

Thank you for your attention.