

Discurso do Senhor Ministro de Estado das Relações Exteriores por ocasião da 39ª Sessão do Comitê sobre Segurança Alimentar Mundial, da FAO

Roma, 17 de outubro de 2012

I am glad to be able to participate in this session of the Committee on World Food Security.

This is an international body that stands out not only because of its mandate regarding food security, which is of crucial importance to all of us, but also because of its unique participatory nature, which allows for a fruitful exchange of ideas among both intergovernmental and non-governmental actors.

It is appropriate and necessary to count on such a wide-ranging participation. The issue of food security is one that we need to face squarely. It is important to be able to count on the inputs of researchers, international civil servants, and NGOs.

We know how urgent the problem is. Even as we speak, hundreds of millions of fellow human beings – perhaps even more than a billion – are suffering from hunger and malnutrition, their lives marred by the lack of

access to what is universally recognized as a basic human right: the right to adequate food.

Brazil, as it is well known, has a vast experience with the question of food security. We have lived through the paradox of being for a long time a nation with extraordinary agricultural resources and yet a nation with millions facing hunger and malnutrition.

But times have changed, and we have changed with the times.

Fortunately, we are now living through the success story of reducing poverty and eradicating hunger. The “Fome Zero” Program is by now well known to all of you.

Social protection programs came to be recognized as a major tool against food insecurity. Brazil broke new ground on social protection and the results are there for anyone to see.

Over the last several years, we have made unprecedented progress. Almost 40 million lifted out of poverty since 2003 and significant reduction in social inequality.

President Dilma Rousseff has set as a main priority of the Brazilian Government the mobilization of the financial and human resources necessary to put an end to extreme poverty in Brazil. The initiative she launched in 2011 – called “Brasil sem Miséria” (in English, “Brazil without Extreme Poverty”) – aims at providing a minimal income to the most needy Brazilians – around 16 million people – who still face a situation of serious vulnerability.

We still have a long way to go. But we are moving forward fast.

Only a few days back, Minister Pepe Vargas, responsible for agricultural development and the combat against hunger, participated in the work of this Committee and gave you a broad picture of Brazil’s policies in the field of food security, as well as our view on specific topics on the Committee’s agenda.

But the problem of food security is also a part – and an important part, I would add – of Brazil’s foreign affairs agenda.

We believe in cooperation. We believe in multilateralism. And we aspire to be a force for peace and development in the world.

There is no development worthy of its name if it does not include social justice and food security, and not for one country in isolation, but for all countries, and for all people in all countries.

So the problem of food security needs to be envisaged in global terms.

In 2050, we will be 9 billion human beings. How will we be able to ensure adequate nutrition for all?

Former President Lula once spoke of hunger as a weapon of mass destruction. To be honest, no words are strong enough to denounce a scourge that destroys lives and erodes human dignity.

Strong messages are needed to raise awareness of the seriousness of the problem of food insecurity. Last August, within the context of the Summer Olympic Games, the United Kingdom organized an important event: the “Hunger Summit”. Brazil co-hosted the meeting and we thought it was effective in terms of using the public interest generated by the Olympics to leverage international action against hunger and malnutrition. As the hosts of the 2016 Olympics, Brasil has committed

itself to organizing a new edition of the “Hunger Summit” in Rio.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We all know today that sustainability is the key word. In that sense, the Rio+20 Conference was a turning point.

The concern over food security was treated as a central issue in the debates and deliberations at Rio de Janeiro.

And rightly so, because no development model can be sustainable if it does not prove itself capable of ensuring food and adequate nutrition for today`s 7 billion, and for tomorrow`s 9 billion.

At Rio, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched what he called the “Zero Hunger Challenge”, with five fundamental goals: universal access to food, reduction of child malnutrition, the doubling of the productivity of micro-producers, promotion of sustainable food chains, and finally the reduction of waste.

For the Brazilian Government it is gratifying to see the “Zero Hunger” battle-cry transformed into a global

endeavor. We are convinced that it must remain as a major priority and the FAO has a leading role to play in this regard. In fact, we believe this role to be so important that we at the Ministry of External Relations are currently examining the possible need for a restructuring of our organizational chart so we can give our best support and contribution to the work of the FAO and other related institutions.

The final document adopted at Rio+20 – with the title “The Future We Want” – has provided a number of important guidelines on how best to address the issue of food security. It stresses the need to pay attention to the situation in rural areas in developing countries, because this is where hunger and malnutrition are more prevalent. It also indicates the need for an increase in production and productivity, by means of better access of farmers – especially poor farmers – to technology and financing.

One of the main results of the Rio+20 Conference is the mandate for the elaboration of Sustainable Development Goals. It is desirable that the question of food security must be one of the main concerns in the definition of the SDGs, be it in the form of specific goals

or as a cross-cutting issue that is relevant in most, if not all, aspects of sustainable development.

Indeed, the link between sustainability and food security has been well established. It can be envisaged from many different angles. I would like to highlight a few points that stand out as priority concerns and that should rank high on our food security agenda.

First of all, international trade is a decisive part of the story.

The trade-related aspects of food security are of the utmost importance for Brazil and for many developing countries. That is the reason why the “Rio+20” document underscored the role of international trade, on the basis of a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system, and included trade-distorting subsidies in the list of issues that need to be addressed. Furthermore, the Members of the WTO are urged to redouble efforts to achieve an ambitious, balanced and development-oriented conclusion of the Doha Development Agenda.

In Brazil’s view, it is indeed crucial to consider food security together with agricultural trade issues.

Protectionism in developed countries has been threatening food security in developing countries, as it hinders their agricultural production by exposing them to unfair competition of subsidized goods as well as denying access to such important consuming markets. Agricultural protectionism also grants unfair advantages to producers which already are in better conditions, and discourages investment in the rural sector in developing countries. It is extremely detrimental, moreover, to the development of global trade chains involving agricultural goods from developing countries, which could generate evident positive effects to the increase of world food security.

A second point of importance is the crucial role of what we in Brazil call “family agriculture” – the smallholder farmers. The Brazilian Government has been implementing a strong program to support small and poor farmers by ensuring them credit and marketing options, by means of Government purchases. This helps them play an increasing role in ensuring the production of food. The main part (around 70%) of the food consumed in Brazil today comes from “family agriculture”.

The emphasis on this kind of agriculture is one of the drivers of the “More Food for Africa” project, which Brazil is carrying out with African countries. Ghana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique are already participating, and others may join in the future. The idea is to provide simultaneously technical cooperation and credit in order to support jobs and income in rural areas in Africa, concentrating on smallholder farmers.

We are also implementing, in cooperation with the FAO and the WFP, and in partnership with the British Government, a project to support purchases of food produced by smallholders in Senegal, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Malawi and Niger. This is the program known as “Purchase from Africans for Africa”. We are helping these countries structure their own programs of governmental purchases of food, with the twin aims of strengthening smallholder agriculture and ensuring access to food for groups that face a situation of food insecurity.

I should add, we are currently conducting a total of 34 bilateral or trilateral technical cooperation projects in the area of agriculture with 17 Sub-Saharan African countries. Some 97 such projects have already been

successfully completed by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency in Africa. Of course, in most of these projects, if not in all of them, food security has been included as a structuring element.

The focus on smallholder agriculture is relevant in our cooperation initiatives with cotton-producing African countries. By strengthening the generation of income for families in rural areas – in a context in which multicropping is a common feature – we are also strengthening food security.

Another aspect I wish to highlight is that no sustainable food security is conceivable without significant progress in productivity in agriculture. The case of Brazil is a good illustration of that. It is estimated that if we were still using the same agriculture technologies that were available in the 1970's, and if we were to produce the same amount of food we are now able to produce, we would have to increase the production area by millions of hectares. The reason why this did not happen is because Brazil, as many other countries, was able to increase food productivity.

Development of agricultural technology is thus an integral part of sustainability. As you all know, Brazil's EMBRAPA is bringing a significant contribution in this effort, not only within Brazil, but also more and more in cooperation with other countries, particularly African countries.

And the third point I would like to stress is the importance of enhancing food security in the context of the serious threats posed by climate change. Adaptation to climate change is a priority, particularly for developing countries, and a major part of adaptation refers to ensuring conditions for agricultural production at a level that ensures food security. As we know, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the appropriate forum to deal with these issues, but FAO can offer an important contribution by working to provide sound technical information on food security issues.

From time to time, the prices of foodstuffs give cause for concern. We share that concern, especially as it may affect the most vulnerable and hinder their access to adequate nutrition. The problem of excess volatility in food commodities prices need to be addressed. The G-20

has this issue on its agenda and the FAO is giving a very positive contribution with the maintenance of the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS).

But we should keep away from the misleading notion that associates food security with low food prices. In the long run, it is the creation of jobs, the generation of income and technological advances that can guarantee food security. Thus, it is necessary to make sure that farmers in developing countries have a sufficient level of income. To that end, it is important to raise production levels and to maintain remunerative prices for agricultural products.

Also, we must not forget that hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty in developing countries. This causes an increased demand for food, and inevitably some upward pressure on prices.

The problem is two-sided: supply and demand. And we need to tackle it from both sides at the same time.

We must continue enhancing social protection and access to food. This will increase demand while making it urgent to increase production. So we must continue, at the same time, to work on agricultural research to enhance

productivity, on investment, on the strengthening of smallholder agriculture. And we must effectively tackle the problem of rich-country subsidies, which distort trade and threaten the development of agriculture in poorer countries.

In the simultaneous action from all these different sides lies, I am convinced, the key to sustainable food security.

Last month, in the context of an event related to our cooperation with Senegal on food security, the Senegalese Prime Minister, Mr Abdoul Mbaye, with whom I met in Dakar, found the most felicitous expression when he said: “We must turn agriculture into the engine of sustainable development, with a view to preventing food insecurity”.

This is a view that aptly sums up the many important aspects of the question.

We must concentrate our efforts on turning agriculture into the engine of sustainable development. It is a good motto for the work of the FAO and of this Committee.

Thank you.

