

Statement by Ambassador José Carlos Rodríguez Ruiz, Permanent Representative of Cuba and Alternate Governor to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
43 session of the Board of Governors, Rome February 11 and 12, 2020

Mr. President Gilbert F. Hounbo:

Dear Governors:

Receive the greetings of the Government of Cuba and my own. It is urgent to invest in sustainable food systems to eradicate hunger before 2030, without this, it will be impossible to eliminate such a lack in the world.

Hunger constitutes the greatest affront to the dignity and essential rights of millions of human beings in the world. The forced, daily and prolonged fasting of millions of people is an unacceptable paradox in the 21st century, when sophisticated technological means and scientific advances are available on the planet, unfortunately concentrated and controlled by few States, that could ensure adequate production and distribution of food for all beings.

There are many causes for which poverty and hunger do not come to an end. In addition to the accumulated historical inequality, it persists as a result of the unjust international order, the indolent and selfish waste of resources and, also, as a consequence of the negative impact of the effects of climate change and conflicts.

According to the Global Wealth Report 2018, global net wealth grew in 2018 to 317 billion dollars, of which 1% of wealth holders, the rich, kept 47%. This disparity increases the challenges facing many countries to achieve their development.

The urgent elimination of hunger also requires an end to the persistent intention of some in turning the international system to serve the strongest and continue to impose unilateral measures to break the economy of some States and cause scarcities to their populations, which is inconsistent with the multipolar world order we need, based on international democratic rules and norms, which must be fair and equitable.

We are concerned that hunger, "that faithful companion of the poor," as Fidel Castro said, far from diminishing increases. The latest data indicates that the number of people suffering from hunger in the world continues to increase, reaching 821 million in 2017 - one in nine people - according to the report "The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2018". There are few real and massive advances in the face of multiple forms of malnutrition and food insecurity.

Its increase in the last three years has once again placed hunger at the levels of a decade ago. This setback sends a clear signal that more needs to be done, beyond the speeches and more urgently, if the intention is to achieve Sustainable Development Goal of reaching Zero Hunger by 2030.

An efficient investment is required to eliminate hunger. At the same time, a different international financial architecture is needed to the one that prevails today, as well as

patterns of sustainable production and consumption. The global scenario, marked by uncertainty, also affects volatility and the level of food prices.

According to FAO, feeding 9 billion people by 2050 will require a 70% increase in current food production. There is a lot of work to be done to make sure we don't leave anyone behind on the road to achieve the SDG goals for food security and better nutrition.

Mr President:

Allow me to refer to the efforts of Cuba in its work to maintain food security, in the midst of considerable adversities, and for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We have significant strengths in Cuba for food production: the will and political responsibility of the State, the technical knowledge and the scientific potential of the nation. The Constitution adopted in 2019, reaffirms the right of all people to food. We consider food security as a key factor for national security.

Agriculture, like the rest of the country's economy, is open to foreign investment, which we consider strategic.

The past 2019 was a very difficult year for the economy of the country, mainly due to the resurgence in the application of the restrictive measures of the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States for six decades against the people of Cuba.

The affectations that the sectors of the Food Industry and of the Agriculture by this cause registered in the last year amount to 413 million 793 thousand 100 dollars, which meant an increase of 66 million 195 thousand 100 dollars with respect to the previous period.

Despite the priority given by the Government to protect agriculture with the supply of fuels, only 71% of the approved diesel has been delivered and, in addition, national inputs for agricultural production have been affected by lack of raw materials. The lack of main incomes during this year caused the insufficiency of fertilizers, which generated affectations between 15 and 45% of the planted areas, mainly in products such as rice, coffee, beans, corn, bananas and tomatoes.

Despite the difficulties, my country will continue to work for its sustainable development.

Cuba has formed the national mechanism for the articulation of the SDGs, the National Group for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, chaired by the Ministry of Economy and Planning and integrated by 39 national organizations and entities, five organizations and nine research centers.

The plan for compliance with the SDGs corresponds to the National Economic and Social Development Plan of the country, in which food security is a priority.

The National Food Security Plan has been conceived along with the development of the Municipal Supply Program, which seeks to encourage local food production and the strengthening of value chains. A goal of this Plan is to have 30 pounds per capita per month of agricultural products and five kilograms of protein. It is a commitment of the country and the agriculture system.

It also works on four foreign investment projects for the production of pork meat and its commercialization, in the provinces of Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Mayabeque and Artemisa.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recognized Cuba as the fifth country in the top 14 that have managed to reduce hunger and malnutrition rates steadily for several years.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) considers my country as the only one in Latin America and the Caribbean that has eliminated severe child malnutrition, thanks to the efforts of the Cuban government. We also appreciate international cooperation in support of those efforts.

We thank IFAD, in particular for its cooperation with Cuba, which we can describe as efficient and timely. It is our desire to continue strengthening work links and exchanges of experiences with developing countries and with IFAD programs.

Cuba reiterates that it will honor its commitments to IFAD.

Mr. President, Cuba will maintain its firm commitment to the defense of peace, multilateralism, and the strengthening of the UN.

In 2020, the world commemorates the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. The UN Charter called in 1945 to save the world from another world war and asked for a permanent commitment to guarantee peace, security, dignity and development for all the peoples of the world. Let us enforce, without prejudice, those purposes. Let us all do justice prevails.

May the earth be fertilized with seeds and equity, not with weapons and selfishness.

Thank you