

Statement by the representative of the Dominican Republic

Distinguished Governors of the International Fund for Agricultural Development and colleagues from country missions and representations present here today.

It is a great pleasure for me to share a few words with you about how we in the Dominican Republic understand the challenges and opportunities facing us in strengthening food security in an island state such as ours, with high levels of climate vulnerability and risks of disasters.

The Dominican Republic is the largest economy in the Caribbean region. In 2022, despite energy, food and climate shocks, the economy recovered to historic real GDP growth levels of around 5 per cent. With this performance the country returned to its place among the fastest growing economies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Underpinning this excellent performance was highly dynamic private investment, both domestic and foreign, motivated by a favourable institutional environment and by optimism about the future, a strong tourism sector, effective anti-inflationary policy and prudent fiscal management.

Despite much uncertainty and negative global forecasts, the Dominican economy is expected to maintain growth above 4.5 per cent this year and next. These results speak clearly to the macroeconomic resilience shown by the Dominican Republic in the face of crisis and external shocks.

However, these achievements should not make us lose sight of the risks and challenges we face. On one hand, lower global growth projected for 2023, geopolitical tensions and persistent inflationary pressures are clear threats to the sustainability of the country's economic performance of the past few years. On the other, our economy and our communities continue to be highly vulnerable. Growth is being achieved at the expense of our natural capital and its benefits are distributed in a way that is highly inequitable in both social and territorial terms.

With respect to agriculture and food security, the country has also posted significant achievements. The incidence of undernutrition has been reduced and maintained, and today stands at less than 7 per cent. The Dominican Republic ranked among countries with low rates of hunger on the 2022 Global Hunger Index. Agricultural activity has seen sustained growth, contributing more than 5 per cent of GDP, close to 8 per cent of exports, more than 80 per cent of the food supply, more than 350,000 employees or nearly 8 per cent of total employment, and numerous environmental services. In addition, although today's rural economy is very diverse, agricultural activity continues to be the main driver of wealth in rural areas.

Nevertheless, agriculture is one of our most vulnerable economic sectors and the one with the lowest productivity. More than 80 per cent of jobs in the sector are informal, hourly income is just 70 per cent of the national average, and agriculture is one of the lowest paying sectors, especially for women and youth: 70 per cent of people earning income from agricultural labour are in the three lowest income deciles.

As many of you know, this means that – paradoxically – those who produce the most food are those who suffer most from food insecurity. At the same time, low returns on agriculture have been pushing people out of rural areas, especially young people, who do not see a promising future for themselves in farming.

This situation, which reflects adverse structural conditions, needs to be reversed if we are to make strides towards poverty reduction and the exercise of economic and social rights in rural areas, and towards better food security for all.

Achieving this presupposes, among many other things, making faster and more determined progress towards an inclusive transformation of agriculture that can lift the constraints on small-scale production currently limiting its growth, particularly access to technology, water, land, credit and markets.

At the same time, it presupposes a transformation to make agriculture more resilient to climate shocks. In the Dominican Republic, as in other countries in the region, agriculture is the activity most affected by extreme hydrometeorological events. In addition to damaging rural livelihoods, such events lead to higher prices for food in urban areas. It is absolutely critical, therefore, that we seek ways not only to transform and modernize agriculture, especially small-scale agriculture – an agenda that has been pending for too long – but also to make it more able to resist and recover from the hardships caused by the effects of climate change.

We in the Dominican Republic are committed to this threefold agenda: transforming agriculture, promoting inclusive rural development that incorporates women and young people, and seeking ways to strengthen agrifood systems and achieve higher levels of food and nutritional security.

We recognize, however, that we cannot achieve this alone. We need to exchange ideas, learn from each other, cooperate in the broadest and purest sense of the word and forge alliances. Only in this way will we have the capacity to achieve transformation, make progress on the 2030 Agenda goals and overcome emerging global challenges.

Finally, I would like to thank IFAD for the invaluable support to our country being provided through the programme PRORURAL, with the objective of promoting associations of small-scale producers and raising their productivity through good agricultural practices.

Building upon this programme, we would like to learn, improve and eventually scale up the kind of comprehensive interventions we are currently testing. Our hope is that this will transform the small farms benefiting from the programme and help convert them to prosperous businesses and that, in this way, we can transform rural life in the broader sense to make it a place of greater well-being. We hope to continue to rely on IFAD as we make our way along this journey.

Many thanks.