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THIRTIETH REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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PRESSING GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ISSUES: HUNGER-FREE LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN INITIATIVE

Background

1. Economic and social inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean has led to an increase in hunger and malnutrition. Our continent has major disparities that impact on progress and exacerbate differences within countries. The vulnerable groups suffer most, with data indicating that rural communities, indigenous peoples, women and children are most affected by the inequalities.
2. Some countries' lack of technical and institutional capacity to deal with this issue has incurred a high cost. According to figures from the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the total cost of child malnutrition in Central America and the Dominican Republic in 2004 amounted to US\$6 659 million, because of higher healthcare costs, inefficiencies in education and loss of productivity, equivalent to 6.4% of the GDP of that region. Ninety percent of the study's estimated cost comes from the lost productivity of 1 700 000 people who would have belonged to the working age population had they not been affected by malnutrition. The study quantifies an average two years of schooling lost by those suffering child malnutrition.¹
3. Hunger and malnutrition are not linked to food shortages. Regional food production in 2001-2003 was 30% above the protein and calorie requirements of the population. Yet, Latin America and the Caribbean still has 52.4 million people suffering hunger, corresponding to 10% of the population without adequate access to food.
4. Children are affected in their development, with more than 9 million stunted and 4.1 million underweight. The latest UNICEF reports on disparities in levels of nutrition in the Region place Latin America and the Caribbean in a crisis situation, with the number of children at high risk of death concealed by national averages. "These differences and levels of chronic malnutrition are unacceptable from the point of view of the right to food and children's rights. However, the

¹ ECLAC-WFP, 2007. The cost of hunger. Economic and social impact of child malnutrition. Overview. Central America and Dominican Republic.

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disparities that exist in countries that have low national averages can also be considered a violation of established rights".²

5. According to FAO estimates, if all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean were to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving the percentage of hunger and poverty by 2015, there would still be 41 million undernourished persons in the Region. As was stated in the Information Note that the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) presented to the Committee on World Food Security: "So long as hunger is not perceived as a political priority and a strictly technical or humanitarian problem, food security will continue to be given low priority on national and global agendas. Food security can only be achieved for all inhabitants of the Region through long-term programmes, anchored in institutional and legal frameworks and supported by decision-makers, politicians, the media and civil society as a whole".³

The Initiative

6. It was to place hunger on national agendas that the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean (HFLAC) Initiative was launched at the Latin American Conference on Chronic Hunger (Guatemala City, September 2005), administered by the Secretariat of the Central America-Brazil Summit (Guatemala, 13 September 2005), where the attending Heads of State and Government of the member countries of the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the Federative Republic of Brazil gave their support. Aware that the Region had the capacity to eradicate hunger before the established time frame, the Initiative set itself the objective of providing all inhabitants of the Region with access to a minimum of three wholesome meals a day. This objective would be achieved through political commitment of the governments of the Region and through the commitment of society as a whole.

7. The Plenary of the 29th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean (Caracas, April 2006) supported the Initiative and requested that FAO promote its implementation and act as coordinator.

8. The Initiative places emphasis on the implementation of medium and long-term public policies and on collaboration between countries to combat hunger. It also seeks to renew efforts to achieve the United Nations Millennium Goals, strengthening Goal 1 and setting the even more ambitious target of completely eradicating hunger in the Region.

9. Colombia, Brazil and the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI) have supported a series of actions and activities to assist the work of the Technical Secretariat of the Initiative.

10. The delegates of the ten countries that make up the Working Group (WG) in support of the Initiative decided to endorse the plan of action (Guatemala, November 2006) and determined its priority thrusts for the 2006-2008 biennium. The plan of action and its priorities were presented to United Nations agencies for implementation by countries and subregional and regional institutions with the assistance of international agencies, financing institutions and donors.

11. The plan of action for 2006-2008 proposed the following: *Task 1*: raise the HFLAC Initiative to priority status on national, subregional and regional policy agendas. *Task 2*: advocate implementation of the right to food at national level and development of national partnerships against hunger. *Task 3*: establish and formulate complementary campaigns associating the HFLAC with other initiatives such as the MDGs; poverty reduction strategies; the Ibero-American Summit; the WFP and UNICEF initiative against child malnutrition. *Task 4*: monitor

² UNICEF, 2007. Disparities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Rapid assessment of the nutritional situation. Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean.

³ FAO, 2006. Information Note presented by GRULAC to the 32nd Session of the Committee on World Food Security. Rome.

progress in regional hunger and malnutrition indicators until the objectives of the Initiative are reached. *Task 5*: establish synergies and harmonization in processes with other UN agencies, especially those based in Rome, i.e. the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and WFP.

12. Colombia gave impetus to the Initiative with its strong commitment and political support at two meetings: "First Conference on the Measurement of Food Security" (Antoquia, Colombia, June 2007) and "Second Meeting of the HFLAC Working Group" (Bogotá, September 2007). Nine of the ten countries making up the WG 2025 and 36 delegates were present, in addition to representatives of GRULAC, IICA, WFP, AECI and the Bogotá Without Hunger Programme. The inaugural ceremony was attended by the President of the Republic of Colombia and other dignitaries. The Colombian Government announced its intention to collaborate directly with the Initiative through a plan of action against hunger and malnutrition that it would launch nationally in 2008.

13. The Initiative's networks, projects and field actions against hunger and malnutrition have posted significant results. Its activities have focused on promoting commitment to the right to food and food security as State policy and on concrete actions that can be replicated. At the second meeting of the working group held in Bogotá, the representatives of GRULAC requested a regular exchange of information between the FAO Regional Office (RLC), the countries and the group itself in order to directly monitor progress, to better coordinate policy proposals and to provide guidelines and priorities in a regular and direct manner. It was decided to ask all the countries of the Region, through GRULAC, to designate an official national focal point for the HFLAC Initiative. It was also recommended that ministries, civil society institutions and the private sector be mindful of the Initiative and that it be disseminated among donors and international agencies.

14. The work of the Initiative's Technical Secretariat, conducted in collaboration with FAO's Right to Food Unit in Rome, to promote and establish the right to food has been constant and effective. The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food commended Latin America and the Caribbean for its dynamism in approving a regional initiative to eradicate hunger and ensure food security which positions the right to adequate food as a regional priority. Guatemala, Ecuador and Brazil already have food security laws and Argentina recognizes the right to food through an emergency law approved in 2002. These instruments have established coordinating bodies responsible for their implementation. Bolivia, Peru, Panama, Mexico and Nicaragua have issued decrees that will soon become law. Honduras is starting the process this year.

15. At a press conference, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Paraguay, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Haiti, WFP and FAO reported on progress towards the right to food and supported activities on this theme of World Food Day.

16. The Technical Secretariat supports projects in Paraguay, Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru for the establishment of national food security programmes. It will also provide support to national projects.

17. The Initiative's actions and activities in priority and other countries of the Region include:

- **Argentina**: launching of a book on the right to food; photograph competition; and support to the Food Security Reference Centre in Catamarca.
- **Bolivia**: course on food and nutritional security; evaluation of the Alto la Paz Programme; community micro-garden, urban and peri-urban agriculture project; support to the law on food security; and conference on urban and peri-urban agriculture.
- **Brazil**: participation in the meeting of the Brazilian Society of Agricultural Economics; legal frameworks of the right to food (Fortaleza); and support and participation in the International Congress on Bioenergy (Ouro Preto).
- **Colombia**: organization of the first conference on the measurement of food insecurity; second meeting of the HFLAC Working Group with support from the Colombian

Government; evaluation of the Bogotá Without Hunger Programme; support to the OSRO vegetable gardens project; and activities with business operators.

- **Ecuador:** course on food and nutritional security; concepts workshop; right to food, food and nutritional security (FNS) and food sovereignty; and development of the South-South Cooperation programme with Chile.
- **Guatemala:** law on FNS; measurement of food security; and support to the development of a FNS measurement survey.
- **Haiti:** allocation of staff to pursue Initiative activities and support the National Food Security Council; development of South-South Cooperation programme with Chile.
- **Honduras:** support to the national seminar on food security.
- **Mexico:** support to food banks; meeting of the Latin American Parliament; support to the discussion of constitutional reform; organization of a workshop on the multi-dimensional measurement of poverty (which served as the basis for Mexico's inclusion of poverty measurement in a food security survey).
- **Nicaragua:** partly in-person course on FNS; development of programme of cisterns and bio-digesters; and support to the law on FNS.
- **Paraguay:** course on food and nutritional security; and support to project on institutionalization.
- **Peru:** support to entrepreneurs and course for journalists.

18. This document summarizes the progress that has been fostered by the Technical Secretariat of the Initiative in four areas of intervention:

- identification and appraisal
- awareness and dissemination
- training, measurement and assessment
- intervention models

19. It also describes the areas, actors and cooperation activities that have received attention, suggests intervention models that could be replicated in other countries of the Region and presents proposals for the period 2008-2010.

20. Priority countries were identified for programmes against hunger and malnutrition, and appraisals and evaluations were conducted of specific programmes. This stage was followed by awareness-raising and dissemination to convert the right to food and food security into State policy. An array of advocacy activities were pursued in this initial phase and during the first months of work: conferences, seminars, workshops, meetings with officials and parliamentarians, academics and others, and publications in the media to place hunger on the regional policy agenda and to implement concrete actions to combat it.

21. The Initiative organized regional training workshops and seminars to build national capacities for the formulation of public policies and the right to food. FNS status was monitored through measurement and evaluation activities including support to the Network of Research and Training on Food and Nutritional Security (REDSAN), research and the evaluation of income transfer programmes and FNS policies. New methods of measuring FNS were also promoted, including perception surveys and the adoption of scale of food security in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁴

22. The fourth and current phase is the ground deployment of actions to eradicate hunger: building cisterns in Nicaragua; support to national malnutrition programmes and small projects, with the transfer of technicians and experts through agreements with ministries of Brazil and Chile; evaluation of programmes in Colombia, Bolivia and Brazil; development of food security

⁴ These are qualitative scales that evaluate household food security. This methodology of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been used in Brazil and Colombia at national level and can produce disaggregated mapping of food insecurity, from lowest to highest level: ward, municipality, subregion, region, country.

programmes in the Andean countries; cooperation agreements with entrepreneurs; and support for food banks.

23. Although progress has been made, it is important to note that challenges still remain. The complete eradication of hunger in the Region will require even greater impetus. Agreed commitments, activities and field actions, both in terms of support to national malnutrition programmes and innovative models applied in critical sectors, have produced strong tangible results that need to be further built upon.

Identification and appraisal

24. As a first step, the Initiative identified priority countries with an unfavourable hunger and malnutrition scenario. Indicators, reports, research and field sources were scrutinized to identify countries at highest risk. Analyses were conducted to determine knowledge, institutional capacity and functions for implementation and support of food security programmes.

25. The priority countries were collectively identified by the Regional Office through project programming and formulation missions. On the basis of the qualitative and quantitative information collated, it was decided to target Haiti, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay, with specific actions in other countries of the Region.

26. The Initiative seeks to systematically deploy good practices for food and nutritional security in order to raise its international profile, stimulate discussion of the replicability of strategies and share lessons and experiences among countries. Noteworthy programmes promoted and implemented at national and local level included the Zero Hunger Programme⁵; Food and Nutritional Improvement (MANA) in Antioquia, Colombia, because of the comprehensiveness of its action and its indicators of impact; the JUNTOS programme in Peru; the Zero Malnutrition Project in Bolivia; the Initiative to Eradicate Child Chronic Malnutrition (WFP, IDB, UNICEF, OPS); FAO's Special Programme for Food Security which is gradually evolving into national programmes in several countries, namely Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Colombia.

Awareness and dissemination

27. After identifying the principal inadequacies of the priority countries, the Initiative launched its phase of awareness and dissemination of the right to food and food security as a State policy requiring cross-sectoral coordination, clear responsibilities and allocation of resources.

28. The Initiative used publications, meetings, courses and other ways of projecting the issue of hunger and malnutrition in order to get it onto national political agendas, focusing on primary audiences that included journalists, parliamentarians, politicians, businessmen, judges and lawyers, employees of national and international non-governmental organizations and civil society leaders. Activities were pursued with government officials and authorities in ministries (health, education and social welfare). The HFLAC Initiative has a web site and a blog, currently receiving more than 4 500 hits.

29. The Initiative has collaborated with the UN agencies in producing two key documents: "Hunger and Social Cohesion" (WFP, ECLAC), which was launched in the presence of the Presidents of Spain and Chile, the Executive Secretary of ECLAC and officers from the AECI. Reference was made at the launching to the importance of the topic of inequality and hunger in the Region; the book "Swapping Debt for Food", produced in partnership with ECLAC, which puts forward innovative mechanisms to finance FNS initiatives in the Region, a proposal that was incorporated into the plan of action that the Presidents of the Region signed at the XVII Ibero-American Summit (Santiago, November 2007).

⁵ <http://www.fomezero.gov.br/>

Training, measurement and assessment

30. The Initiative developed a series of courses, workshops and training events to strengthen national capacities to develop and pursue public policies and programmes for the eradication of hunger and to guarantee citizens the right to adequate food, including remote and in part face-to-face courses on food and nutritional security, family farming and combating poverty in Nicaragua, Ecuador, Brazil and Paraguay. It also provided input in the form of a report on the viability of the new legislative framework for the right to food.

31. The Initiative started training for key target audiences (including journalists) to raise the visibility of the right to food and food security, launching the first remote course. It collaborated with the Regional Technical Cooperation Project for Training in Economics and Agrarian and Rural Development Policies in Latin America (FODEPAL), through the University Association, and the course on Food Security, Poverty and Development in Ecuador, in partnership with the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO). The Initiative and REDSAN together launched the first annual competition of research papers on food and nutritional security.

32. Food security measurement and assessment activities were developed during this third stage. The Initiative gathered statistics on hunger and malnutrition in the Region to monitor the state of FNS and assessed the impact of programmes to determine their success. This served to develop a conceptual analysis of hunger and related aspects, such as economic growth, governance and human rights. The Initiative has been involved in assessing food security programmes, including the Alto La Paz Programme (Bolivia), the Bogotá Without Hunger Programme (Colombia) and the Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture Programmes (Venezuela and Brazil), in a singular exercise of integration of school gardens and nutritional education for students.

Intervention models

33. The following intervention models were developed on the basis of research and assessment, inputs from REDSAN and evaluation of projects in the field: The Cisterns Programme (Nicaragua) which subsidizes the building of water tanks to harvest clean rainwater; the Biodigestors Programme (Nicaragua) which permits the generation of energy in the home; and the Food Security Programme through projects in Peru, Haiti, Paraguay and Ecuador.

34. The Initiative uses its technical and financial capacity to support national programmes in the Andean countries, reinforcing projects to combat hunger and malnutrition in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador, jointly operated by the governments of those countries and the FAO Regional Office. The national programmes receive support at institutional level and to strengthen governmental and local capacity.

35. The Initiative is working with Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru under the framework of South-South Cooperation and has instituted agreements with Chile's Ministry of Health for the exchange of knowledge, especially in relation to that country's experience in nutrition. The first activities were initiated in Ecuador in late 2007 and then in Bolivia and Peru. As regards cooperation agreements with the private sector, activities have been initiated with food banks in Argentina, Mexico, Chile and Paraguay, with the redistribution of foods that are not marketable but are still fit for consumption.

Proposals 2008-2010

36. The HFLAC Initiative has become a central vehicle for field activities and actions to combat hunger in the Region. Although there has been significant progress, the set objective will only be achieved if the Initiative is given added impetus to extend its current efforts and to introduce new ones to complement the initial objectives. The proposals for 2008-2010 are therefore:

37. **To broaden actions of strengthening the institutional framework for the right to food and food and nutritional security.** By the end of 2007, Guatemala, Ecuador and Brazil had laws on food security and bodies to coordinate and oversee implementation of those laws, while

Bolivia, Peru, Panama, Mexico and Nicaragua had issued decrees that will soon become law. The aim is to have decrees enacted and to get other countries to draft related legislation (Honduras, Haiti and Dominican Republic) so that laws can be applied in this area and the right to food formally established.

To this end, it is important to combine efforts to formulate a national plan of food and nutritional security in countries. The Plenary is invited to make recommendations on projects that can serve to generate positive synergies in this respect.

38. To expand South-South Cooperation programmes and actions in the Region. By the end of 2007, the Initiative had developed South-South Cooperation actions with the governments of Chile and Brazil. The aim is to coordinate actions with official cooperation bodies of these countries so as to replicate successful experiences and promote regional integration.

The Conference might like to discuss the development of intervention models through this type of cooperation, with the transfer of knowledge and techniques on the ground, which would require analysis of other possible mechanisms.

39. To collaborate in the strengthening of government and cross-sectoral capacities and actions in areas relating to food security. Because of the identified difficulties in organizing and implementing actions to promote food security in the countries of the Region, the Initiative will support and strengthen government and cross-sectoral capacities through the exchange of experts and experiences. The aim is to generate knowledge and to optimize the administration of food security programmes, facilitating coordination and execution at cross-sectoral level, stakeholder responsibility and awareness of civil society.

The Conference is invited to discuss institutional models that could be applied in the countries of the Region and the need to generate knowledge of State modernization processes, citizens' participation and cross-sectoral coordination, analysing lessons learned and studying the feasibility of transferring those experiences to the countries of the Region.

40. To replicate field intervention models. Field actions have been an integral part of the fourth phase of the Initiative. The intention is to extend those actions to other countries of the Region in order to exchange information through concrete models and actions to combat hunger and malnutrition.

The Conference might like to discuss the inclusion of vulnerable groups in these programmes and is invited to examine the approaches, policies and programmes that could be applied to optimize actions in the field, starting with a gender-based approach and the participation of indigenous groups, in order to include all possible perspectives in projects.

41. To support and strengthen national programmes to combat hunger and malnutrition. Since late 2007 the Initiative has supported national and local projects in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay, in the framework of collaborative action with governments to generate a plan of work to combat hunger and malnutrition. In the next years, this support will be strengthened through direct actions implemented with governments and aimed at detecting areas of greatest vulnerability within countries.

FAO has developed a variety of rural programmes that have represented significant inputs for the poorer populations of the Region; however the sustainability of those programmes has been questioned as the levels of undernutrition and malnutrition in the Region have remained unchanged. The Conference is invited to analyse the linkages of those rural programmes with national programmes to combat hunger and malnutrition, including income transfer programmes.

42. To expand and deepen food security research and development at regional level. In order to encourage studies and analyses of food security, REDSAN organized a research contest financed by the Initiative. Seminars and forums were also held. Meetings organized by the Regional Office and countries of the Region have served to appraise the situation, including the

Third National Conference on Food and Nutritional Security (III CNSAN), held in Fortaleza, Brazil, in July 2007. It is hoped that the Food Security Observatory will soon be established to stimulate the exchange of information and research on food security and to contribute to the recording and use of existing indicators, programmes and activities. It will also serve to identify stakeholders, evaluating past experiences and supporting the development of public food security policy.

The Plenary is invited to discuss the support and role of foreign and domestic universities in the generation of knowledge and the exchange of experiences in relation to food and nutritional security, and to put forward recommendations for their effective use.

43. To expand and encourage awareness and dissemination. Many awareness and dissemination actions have been carried out in the initial and current phases of the Initiative. These have served to generate networks linking governments and academic sectors, civil society, journalists and NGOs in various countries of the Region. The issue of hunger and malnutrition has featured in the regional media and on policy and social agendas, stimulating discussion at policy-making and parliamentary level, and in academic circles, the private sector and civil society. These actions need to be continued, with a strengthening of existing networks and the creation of new networks to give even more visibility to the issue at regional level.

The Plenary is invited to discuss the generation of networks with different national sectors: media, civil society, NGOs, etc.

44. To bolster and multiply agreements with the private sector. The agreements and actions with entrepreneurs that the Initiative has generated have proved to be both successful and innovative. For example, modalities have been proposed for collaboration and exchange between public and private sectors at regional level; actions have been developed with food banks of Argentina, Mexico, Chile and Paraguay; support has been given to actions of the United Nations Global Compact for intervention of the private sector in critical areas of hunger and malnutrition; there was agreement on the support of business companies in the development of a pilot project in the region of Capayán, Argentina, and another in Montevideo, Uruguay; and networks with groups were established. These and other activities with the private sector will be strengthened during the next years, replicating models of action and exchanging knowledge at regional level.

Given that there are still urban areas with significant levels of undernutrition, the Conference is invited to discuss the types of action that could be developed with support and participation of the private sector.

45. To expand and consolidate agreements with other United Nations agencies. Under the pooling of efforts to combat hunger and malnutrition, the Initiative has forged agreements with ECLAC and WFP to raise awareness of these issues and to create a sustainable mechanism of mobilization of resources for food security in the Region. These concepts will continue to be promoted in countries so that they may be applied and developed. Efforts will also be made to secure the widespread implementation of policies to ensure the right to food in all countries of the Region, thus making food and nutritional security a reality.

The Conference is invited to discuss support networks resulting from joint work with other UN agencies and fundamental for achieving concrete results in reducing hunger and malnutrition at regional level.