

16th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-16) Rural Development

May 6th, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor to take the floor on behalf of the 21 countries from Latin America and the Caribbean that are part of the Rio Group.

Since this is the first time that our Group takes the floor at this meeting, we would like to congratulate the Chair of CSD-16, Mr. Francis Nhema, and the other Bureau Members for their election as well as to convey the support of our Delegations for the success of this session of the Commission.

The subject that occupies us today is of extreme importance for our region. An important part of our population is located in rural areas and has agriculture as its main economic activity. In our region, the rural development and agriculture are closely interlinked and contribute to our efforts to eradicate the poverty and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The development of Latin America and the Caribbean is closely linked to the growth in agricultural productivity, which at the same time is related to a better and greater use of agricultural resources, particularly land and water. This growth does not take place homogeneously in our countries: there are agricultural stagnant areas and others in expansion; the same thing happens with land productivity, increasing in some areas and declining in others.

In agriculture the production factors are interlinked in different ways depending on conditions, such as farming markets, market processes, demand (for domestic consumption and for export), market prices, among others.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the problem of sustainable exploitation of the land is accentuated with increasing levels of land degradation and desertification, affecting large areas of the region and threatening food security.

Additional problems are deforestation, excessive use of land for grazing and soil erosion.

An additional factor to take into account is that agriculture and rural development are developed in a context of vulnerability to climate change. For example, the salinization of agricultural soils due to irrigation is particularly significant in Argentina, Mexico and Peru that have extensive dryland areas. In the Caribbean Islands the agricultural zones are by itself limited.

In light of the above, our countries look to promote and foster the competitiveness of rural areas and support micro, small and medium size enterprises. Also, we strive to integrate the environmental dimension of rural development in our strategies.

Therefore, we believe that the international community should support national development programmes designed by our countries according to national needs and priorities, and strengthen regional mechanisms aimed at:

- Increase investment in public services and infrastructure. Rural communities face the highest rates of poverty, lack of access to public services and access to markets, as well as inadequate infrastructure that does not let them reach their full potential.
- Identify alternatives to ensure the best use of the most dynamic agricultural sectors in the region and to support the most vulnerable ones, with special emphasis in restructuring programs and fighting poverty.
- Integrate regional and sectoral policies for combating poverty in rural areas. Poverty is linked not only to agriculture as such but to specific regions, and the fact that nearly half of rural income comes from non-farm activities.
- Use of appropriate and environmentally friendly technologies for better conditions in rural areas, productive conversion, collecting, conditioning and transformation to strengthen the marketing of primary production, with the aim to a enhanced integration of the rural population in the productive chains, and the creation and consolidation of productive and services micro-enterprises to generate alternative employment and rural incomes.
- Develop the support of schemes for rural populations affected by extreme weather events.
- Create, strengthen or expand rural financial institutions.
- Encourage forms of association and business to generate employment and income in rural areas

- Establish programmes of micro-credit and micro-finance aimed to the poor in rural areas. The access to savings services, investment, credit, remittances and life insurance, among other, allows a better use and administration of their own resources, providing opportunities for improving wealth and enhances consolidation of family units.
- Develop policies, strategies and instruments for rural development to improve capital development of family-held production units; promote sustainable management of natural resources; the development of primary production projects; incorporate transformation processes, value-adding and services generation; develop capacity building in rural areas and the promotion and consolidation of business organization, among other activities.
- Set up support programmes for priority groups in rural areas, such as women, youth, seniors, people with disabilities, people without access to land, and to local and indigenous communities, in order to foster conditions for human, economic and social development and induce their active participation, equitably and comprehensively across productive investment projects, technical assistance, training and organization.
- Provide training programmes and capacity building regarding the management of fertilizers and pesticides in farming activities, with the aim of protecting human health, maintaining the viability of the soil and promoting food security.
- Strengthen international technical and financial cooperation for the implementation of national policies and strategies for rural development in countries of our region, which require the continued international support in this area. This is, in turn, crucial to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and to meet the considerable challenges that exist with regard to internal asymmetries of our countries, often related to rural populations.

I thank you.