

(Transcription)

The Honourable Devant Maharaj

Minister for Food Production of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Chairperson, Heads of Delegations, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, it is indeed a privilege to address the 38th Session of the FAO Conference on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

The team of sustainable food system for food security and nutrition is very timely. At the global level with almost 870 million persons chronically undernourished, we the Governments and people of this planet need to take consistent actions to eliminate world hunger.

The Zero Hunger Challenge launched by the United Nations Secretary-General seeks to achieve this very noble ideal of ending hunger. In seeking to develop and implement sustainable food systems however countries in the Caribbean have particular characteristics and vulnerabilities that should be considered. These include high food import bills, high incidence of non-communicable diseases, increased frequency of natural disaster and susceptibility to climate change, low rates of adoption of new technology.

It is within these turbulent environments characterized by food insecurity that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has consistently identified agriculture and food security as key priorities in the national development agenda. This priority was highlighted by my Government's Medium-Term Policy Framework 2011-2014 entitled *Innovation for Lasting Prosperity* and reiterated in the National Food Production Action Plan 2012-2015.

While the Government of Trinidad and Tobago views the role of the state of agricultural development, principally as being a facilitator, it also recognizes that adequate planning is a critical factor in insuring sustainable food systems.

In this regard, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is focusing on the development of six commodity groups, namely: staples, vegetables, legumes and pulses, fruits, livestock, and aquaculture. Generally, the target is to achieve a greater degree of self-sufficiency in the Medium-Term for each commodity.

Already we have measured for the first time in over two years a reduction in the food inflation to single digit numbers, and for the first time in over three years a growth the agriculture sector.

Chairperson, primary production is just one element of the food value chain. The trend however is for food production processing and distribution to be increasingly organized where the flow of inputs, products, information and financial resources are closely coordinated among farmers, processors, retailers, and other economic actors.

Hence, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in addition to considering ramping up the primary production and optimizing the role of the sector in national development, also takes into account other stages in the value chain, such as processing, marketing, food services and agro-tourism.

In this regard, packing houses and agro-processing facilities are being established in five locations in Trinidad and Tobago thereby providing a secure location for farmers to add value to their produce for supply to various markets.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago without doubt recognizes that the provision of adequate infrastructure for the sector is critical if we are to achieve our goal of national food security, especially to take into account the effects of climate change.

We are taking note that the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLA, conducted an assessment of the economic impact of climate change under agriculture sector in Trinidad and Tobago in 2011 and identified the establishment of on-farm water storage such as ponds as a most attractive adoption option for climate change based on the benefit cost ratio.

The Ministry of Food Production of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has in fact been encouraging its shift in agricultural practice which relies solely on supply of water to water conservation, agriculture and water harvesting.

Hence, water management and flood control program of the Ministry includes the acceleration of on-farm irrigation projects thereby facilitating the opportunity for farmers to shift production from seasonal cropping to year-end cropping. The number of on-farm ponds established in 2011-2012 was 549, an increase of over 170% over the two year period 2008-2009.

Chairperson, given the limited arable and available for agriculture production and small island development states such as Trinidad and Tobago, it is recognized that a regional collaborative approach is required to insure a sustainable food system. Hence, the government of Trinidad and Tobago is actively pursuing the establishment of a food security policy with the cooperative Government of the Republic of Guyana.

As I conclude, I wish to emphasize that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is an advocate for power of partnerships and that sustainable food systems requires simultaneous and consistent action on various funds including the sector of primary agriculture production, agro-processing, health, trade, infrastructure and education. While the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is taking a leadership role, we continue to partner with other relevant stakeholders including non-governmental organizations, private sector, civil society, and international organizations such as FAO to achieve the goal of food security.

Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you.