

REPORT

**Nassau,
Bahamas,
16 to 20
June, 1998**

**Twenty-fifth
FAO Regional Conference
for Latin America and
the Caribbean**



FOOD
AND
AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE
UNITED
NATIONS

FAO State Members serviced by the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (20 June 1998)

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Date and place of the FAO Regional Conferences for Latin America and the Caribbean

First	-- Quito, Ecuador, 18-25 September 1949
Second	-- Montevideo, Uruguay, 1 - 12 December 1950
Third	-- Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1 -10 September 1954
Fourth	-- Santiago, Chile, 19-30 November 1956
Fifth	-- San Jose, Costa Rica, 12-21 November 1958
Sixth	-- Mexico, D.F., Mexico, 9-20 August 1960
Seventh	-- Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 17-27 November 1962
Eighth	-- Viña del Mar, Chile, 13-29 March 1965
Ninth	-- Punta del Este, Uruguay, 5-16 December 1966
Tenth	-- Kingston, Jamaica, 2-13 December 1968
Eleventh	-- Caracas, Venezuela, 12-20 October 1970
Twelfth	-- Cali, Colombia, 21 August - 2 September 1972
Thirteenth	-- Panama, Panama, 12-23 August 1974
Fourteenth	-- Lima, Peru, 21-29 April 1976
Fifteenth	-- Montevideo, Uruguay, 8-19 August 1978
Sixteenth	-- Havana, Cuba, 26 August - 6 September 1980
Seventeenth	-- Managua, Nicaragua, 30 August - 10 September 1982
Eighteenth	-- Buenos Aires, Argentina, 6-15 August 1984
Nineteenth	-- Barbados, 5-13 August 1986
Twentieth	-- Recife, Brazil, 2-7 October 1988
Twenty-first	-- Santiago, Chile, 9-13 July 1990
Twenty-second	-- Montevideo, Uruguay, 28 September 1992
Twenty-third	-- San Salvador, El Salvador, 29 August – 2 September 1994
Twenty-fourth	-- Asuncion, Paraguay, 2-6 July 1996
Twenty-fifth	-- Nassau, Bahamas, 16-20 June 1998

**REPORT OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE
FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

(Nassau, Bahamas, from 16 to 20 June 1998)

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

1998

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ISBN 92-854-1022-7

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SUMMARY OF THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Multilateral discussions on the reform of agricultural trade

For the attention of Governments

The Conference:

1. Underlined the need to further the agricultural trade liberalization process; to eliminate subsidies to exports; accelerate the reduction of production subsidies distort trade; to examine export funding mechanisms; to avoid discrimination in the conditions of market access of agricultural commodities; to reject the use of non-scientifically based sanitary and phytozoosanitary measures as barriers to trade; to prevent the use of food as a political weapon of pressure; and to ensure that special and different treatment given to the least developed countries, in particular the net food-importing developing countries, be effectively put into practice. (para. 47)
2. Noted the importance for agricultural trade of the next round of negotiations under the World Trade Organization and the urgent need for the round to begin before the end of 1999. (para. 49)
3. Recommended that the Governments identify areas of common interest so that they can align their positions at regional and subregional level on the issues to be discussed at the next round. (para. 62)
4. Urged the Governments to reinforce mechanisms for the agricultural sector, both public and private, to participate in the preparation and monitoring of the forthcoming round of negotiations. (para. 63)
5. Agreed that special consideration should be given to small-island states because of their fragility and vulnerability to climatic and economic factors (para. 48).

For the attention of Governments and FAO

The Conference:

6. Agreed in general with the guidelines included in the document LARC/98/2¹ and emphasized the need for strict adherence to the envisaged time-frame for the deepening of agricultural reforms referred to in Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture. (para. 60)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

7. Requested that FAO, within its mandate, help the countries to set up a platform for exchanging ideas during the process of preparation for the next round of negotiations. (para. 64)

8. Asked FAO to establish a regional programme of technical assistance, that would include the training of negotiators, for preparation and monitoring of the next round of negotiations, with the promotion of horizontal co-operation and coordination with other specialized agencies operating in the region. (para. 65)

9. Recommended that FAO, within its mandate, organize technical meetings to support the countries in defining their negotiating positions before the next meeting of the Council of the World Trade Organization. (para. 66)

10. Requested that FAO continue to provide technical assistance on awareness and application of Codex Alimentarius standards. (para. 67)

Rural development strategy as the focus for reduction of extreme poverty in the region

For the attention of Governments

The Conference:

11. Pointed to the need to advance the process of reform of agricultural institutions and the modernization of public structures; to pursue processes of decentralization for greater participation; to accelerate land titling while adapting to different forms of land-ownership; and strengthening legal security of tenure. (para. 44)

¹ LARC/98/2: "Multilateral Discussions on the Reforms of the Agriculture Trade"

12. Emphasized that rural development involved activities other than the strictly agricultural; that off-farm rural employment had acquired growing importance and that efforts to improve living conditions for rural populations should take into account the territorial context as the appropriate framework for design and application of rural development policies. (para. 45)

13. Urged the Governments to include rural development as a priority item on their policy agendas. (para. 70)

14. Noted the return to growth and relative macroeconomic stability. It noted the persistence or accentuation of sharp inequalities in income distribution and the limited progress - in some cases, regression - in overcoming rural poverty, and pointed to the need for measures to neutralize the impact of globalization on small producers. (para. 46)

For the attention of Governments and FAO

The Conference:

15. Endorsed the document LARC/98/3² and drew particular attention to the proposed priority areas which should orient the work of FAO in the region: food security, dynamic insertion in foreign trade, sustainable management of natural resources, and agricultural institutional reform. (para. 68)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

16. Requested that FAO examine the following topics in greater depth: the importance of non-tariff barriers; safeguarding the positive aspects of pre-reform models; the development of human resources regarding training and organization; the role of agriculture in areas of urban influence; the importance of border agricultural corridors; funding for sustainable rural development; the distinction between rural and agricultural development; international migratory flows and their impact on peace and international relations; strengthening government regulatory capacity in basic services; the impact of natural disasters on the instability of food supply; and evaluation of the effects of the globalization process. (para. 69)

17. Recommended that FAO conduct an inter-agency examination of the impact of migration on the rural economy. (para. 71)

² LARC/98/3: "Rural Development Strategy as the Focus towards the Reduction of the Extreme Poverty in the Region"

Follow-up to the World Food Summit

For the attention of Governments

The Conference:

18. Recognized that the political commitment made by Governments at the World Food Summit should be expressed through practical implementation of the Plan of Action to attain the set goals. It recommended that Governments set up an evaluation mechanism, along the lines being developed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), and supported by the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS). (para. 43)

19. Took note of the progress made by countries in follow-up to the World Food Summit and emphasized the importance of such progress for achieving food security and social and economic development. (para. 74)

20. Requested that Governments identify reliable indicators for each commitment of the Plan of Action, particularly those related to access to food. (para. 76)

21. Recommended that Governments step up bilateral co-operation between the countries of the region so as to take advantage of existing capacity and thereby achieve the goals of the Plan of Action. Donor support would have to be sought to render this initiative viable. (para. 77)

22. Called attention to the serious impact of the *El Niño* phenomenon on food security in many countries of the region. (para. 50)

23. Highlighted its importance as a forum to follow up the commitments made at the World Food Summit, examine progress towards the regional goals and report on the matter to the Committee on World Food Security. (para. 56)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

24. Endorsed the decision of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) that the FAO Regional Conferences should take place prior to the sessions of the CFS to facilitate an examination of actions pursued at national and regional level. (para. 75)

25. Requested that FAO reinforce the Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) in a joint operation with the countries and continue providing technical support to mitigate the damage caused by *El Niño*. (para. 50)

Representation of the Region in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

The Conference:

26. Examined the relevant document³ and unanimously elected Dr. Compton Laurence Paul, Executive Secretary of PROCICARIBE, as regional representative in the CGIAR for the period 1999-2002. (para. 78)

Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in the Latin American Region

For the attention of Governments

The Conference:

27. Highlighted the importance of applying the Code in the region to achieve the conservation of resources and the sustainability of fisheries, food security and social and economic development. (para. 79)

28. Called upon Governments to introduce the Code in their legislation and make the necessary institutional and policy changes needed to put it into practice in accordance with national and subregional requirements. (para. 80)

29. Recognized the importance of the Fishery Commission for the Western Central Atlantic (WECAFC) for regional co-operation in the management and conservation of fishery resources and as an instrument for application of the Code in the region. (para. 82)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

30. Asked FAO to continue providing technical co-operation and support in identifying funding for implementation of the Code at country level. (para. 81)

³ LARC/98/5: "Representation of the Region in the CGIAR"

FAO subregional office for Central America

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

31. Reaffirmed the importance of establishing a subregional office for Central America and renewed its request that FAO look into such a possibility. (para. 57)

Concluding Items: Date, place and items for the Twenty-sixth Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

For the attention of Governments and FAO

The Conference:

32. Noted the offer of the delegation of Mexico to host the Twenty-sixth FAO Regional Conference, which would be held in the year 2000. It also welcomed the offer of the delegation of Cuba to host the Twenty-seventh FAO Regional Conference, which would be held in the year 2002. (para. 87)

33. Suggested that in future Regional Conferences, a space be contemplated for informal meetings among the Ministers of Agriculture, in order to promote an exchange of ideas on issues of common interest. (para. 87)

34. Requested that the Secretariat present a main document on the state of agriculture, fisheries and forestry in the Region. This document should be distributed in a timely manner. (para. 87)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

35. Requested that FAO include, among others, the following items in the agenda of the next Regional Conference: fisheries; research and technology transfer; food safety and non-tariff barriers; and the environment and its relation to production and trade. (para. 88)

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Organization of the Conference

36. The Twenty-fifth FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Nassau, The Bahamas, from 16 to 20 June 1998. The Technical Committee met on 16 and 17 June. The Conference was attended by delegations from 29 FAO Member Nations from the region and by observers of countries in other regions, together with representatives of various United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations and international and national non-governmental organizations. A list of participants is provided in Appendix C.

Inaugural ceremony

37. The Conference was inaugurated in the presence of the Prime Minister of The Bahamas, Hon. Hubert A. Ingraham, government officials, members of the delegations, the diplomatic corps accredited to The Bahamas and observers from a variety of agencies.

38. The Director-General of FAO thanked the Government and people of The Bahamas for their generous hospitality and for the welcome extended to the Regional Conference. He pointed out that the attendance of a large number of delegations demonstrated the importance of the items to be discussed for sustainable rural and agricultural development in the region.

39. The Prime Minister welcomed the delegates and remarked that agricultural development is of great relevance in Latin America and the Caribbean where millions of people do not have sufficient food to meet their basic nutritional requirements. Urgent action is needed to achieve food security and eradicate poverty, by investing in human resources, research and the development of an adequate infrastructure.

Election of Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and appointment of Rapporteur Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

40. The Conference elected by acclamation its Bureau whose members are listed in Appendix C. It then adopted the agenda and timetable given in Appendix B.

Statement by the Director-General⁴

41. The Director-General highlighted the principal initiatives that FAO had undertaken to give effect to the Plan of Action adopted by the World Food Summit. He also underlined that FAO's decentralization process was on the point of completion, with the opening of new liaison and subregional offices and reinforcement of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean.

42. He stated that the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean were now much more open, stable and competitive, and were making rapid progress towards economic and commercial integration. He noted, however, that economic growth had not been accompanied by an equitable distribution of income. In some countries, income had tended to become increasingly concentrated. Despite surplus food and agricultural and fishery production in the region, some countries were unable to meet their basic needs. The challenge, he emphasized, was to introduce deep-seated reforms in agricultural policies and institutions to make them more effective in supporting the rural poor.

SUMMARY OF DELIBERATIONS

Country statements and general discussion of the food and agriculture situation in the region

43. The Conference recognized that the political commitment made by Governments at the World Food Summit should be expressed in practical implementation of the Plan of Action to achieve the Summit's goals. It recommended that Governments set up an evaluation mechanism means of periodic reports and precise indicators along the lines being developed by the Committee on World Food Security, and supported by the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS).

44. The Conference pointed to the need to advance in the process of reform of agricultural institutions and the modernization of public structures so that they correspond to the new conditions in which economies function; to pursue processes of decentralization for greater participation, supporting civil society organizations and developing forms of co-ordination between public and private agents; to accelerate land titling while adapting to different forms of land-ownership; and to strengthen legal security of tenure.

45. The Conference emphasized that rural development involved activities other than the strictly agricultural. Off-farm rural employment had acquired growing importance as a source of household income. Efforts to improve the living conditions of rural populations

⁴ LARC/98/INF/4: "Statement of the Director-General"

should take into account the territorial context as the appropriate framework for design and application of rural development policies.

46. The Conference noted the return to growth and relative macroeconomic stability. Nevertheless, it also noted the persistence or accentuation of sharp inequalities in income distribution and the limited progress - in some cases regression - in overcoming rural poverty. It pointed to the need for measures to neutralize the impact of globalization on small producers.

47. The Conference underlined the need to further the agricultural trade liberalization process; eliminate subsidies to exports; accelerate the reduction of production subsidies distorting trade; examine export funding mechanisms; avoid discrimination in the conditions of market access of agricultural commodities; reject the use of non-scientifically based sanitary and phytozoosanitary measures as barriers to trade; prevent the use of food as a political weapon of pressure; support regional integration; and ensure that special and different treatment given to the least developed countries - in particular the net food-importing developing countries - be effectively put into practice.

48. The Conference agreed that special consideration should be given to small-island states because of their fragility and vulnerability to climatic and economic factors.

49. The Conference noted the importance for agricultural trade of the next round of negotiations under the World Trade Organization and the urgent need for the round to begin before the end of 1999, emphasizing that inclusion of agriculture in the so-called Millennium Round should not be used as a pretext for postponement.

50. The Conference called attention to the serious impact of the *El Niño* phenomenon on food security in many countries of the region, causing significant damage to agricultural infrastructure, production losses and distortions in local markets. It requested that FAO reinforce the Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) in a joint operation with the countries and that it continue to provide technical support to mitigate damage.

51. The Independent Chairman of the Council of FAO expressed his satisfaction over the new agricultural model being developed by countries of the region. He encouraged the Governments of developing countries to continue their support to agriculture, even as it is replaced by industry and services as the driving forces of economic growth. He also stated that national social security networks should be reinforced so that the poor, mainly peasant farmers, could be included in the production chain.

52. The participant from OLDEPESCA stressed the importance of fisheries for food security. He reported on the support provided in assessing implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in various countries of the region, whose experiences would be collated and shared with on to the other countries.

Report on past activities, present programmes and priorities in the region⁵

53. The Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative of FAO reported on activities carried out in execution of the recommendations of the 24th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean. He emphasized that follow-up to the World Food Summit had been the guiding framework for actions undertaken in the 1996-97 biennium. FAO support in the region had comprised 122 technical assistance projects, 106 of these on the national level and 16 with regional coverage. There also had been a series of technical and scientific meetings, technical assistance missions and the work of the technical co-operation networks.

54. He drew special attention to the signing of the Aide-Memoire with the Director-General of the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture (IICA), on 18 June 1998 in Nassau, to extend the areas of joint technical co-operation in the region through the basic programme of collaboration in 1998-99.

55. He stressed that future actions in the region should view rural policies in a territorial rather than purely sectoral context; that a reform of the state and decentralization should be seen as a redistribution of economic and policy authority; that multiplicity of the rural sector means building consensus at different levels; and that the proliferation of government entities associated with the rural sector calls for reflection on the new mandate of ministries of agriculture in the region.

Follow-up to the World Food Summit⁶

56. The Conference highlighted its importance as a forum to follow up the commitments made at the World Food Summit, to examine progress towards regional goals and to report on the matter to the Committee on World Food Security.

Actions for the establishment of an FAO subregional office for Central America

57. The Conference reaffirmed the importance of establishing a subregional office for Central America and renewed its request that FAO look into such a possibility.

⁵ LARC/98/INF/5-Corr-1: "Report on past activities, present programmes and priorities in the Region"

⁶ LARC/98/4: "Follow-up to the World Food Summit"

REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

Opening of the Technical Committee

58. The Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative of FAO opened the session of the Technical Committee. He welcomed the delegates and observers and thanked the people and the Government of The Bahamas for their hospitality.

Election of the Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteur Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

59. The Committee unanimously elected the members of the Technical Committee Bureau listed in Appendix C and adopted the agenda and timetable given in Appendix B.

Multilateral discussions on the reform of agricultural trade

60. The Committee agreed in general with the guidelines included in the document⁷ and emphasized the need for strict adherence to the envisaged time-frame for the deepening of agricultural reforms referred to in Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture, and the need for the related negotiations to be precise and be finalized as early as possible.

61. The Committee stressed that discussions on the reform of agricultural trade should be an integral part of negotiations on international trade at the World Trade Organization; nevertheless, this should not be understood as a pre-condition for starting the new round of multilateral agricultural negotiations before the end of 1999.

62. The Committee recommended that Governments identify areas of common interest in order to align their positions at regional and subregional level on the issues to be discussed at the next round.

63. The Committee urged Governments to reinforce mechanisms for the agricultural sector, both public and private, for participation in the preparation and monitoring of the forthcoming round of negotiations.

64. The Committee requested FAO, within its mandate, to help the countries set up a platform for exchanging ideas during the process of preparation for the next round of negotiations. To this end, FAO would have to mobilize its resources and international technical and financial co-operation.

⁷ LARC/98/2: "Multilateral discussions on the Reforms of Agricultural Trade"

65. The Committee asked FAO to establish a regional programme of technical assistance that would include the training of negotiators, for preparation and monitoring of the next round of negotiations, with the promotion of horizontal co-operation and co-ordination with other specialized agencies operating in the region. Important activities to be carried out included dissemination of the experiences of some countries with agricultural negotiating units, the posting of a related forum for discussion on the FAO Regional Office's Website, and the consolidation of the National Committees of Codex Alimentarius.

66. The Committee recommended that FAO, within its mandate, organize technical meetings to support countries in defining their negotiating positions. The first of these should take place during the second half of 1998, before the next meeting of the Council of the World Trade Organization.

67. The Committee requested that FAO continue to provide technical assistance on awareness and application of Codex Alimentarius standards as a way of dealing with non-tariff barriers.

Rural development strategy as the focus for reduction of extreme poverty in the region

68. The Committee endorsed the document⁸ and drew particular attention to the proposed priority areas which should orient the work of FAO in the region: food security, dynamic insertion in foreign trade, sustainable management of natural resources, and agricultural institutional reform.

69. The Committee requested that FAO examine the following topics in greater depth: the importance of non-tariff barriers; safeguarding the positive aspects of pre-reform models; the development of human resources in training and organization; the role of agriculture in areas of urban influence; the importance of border agricultural corridors; funding for sustainable rural development; the distinction between rural and agricultural development; international migratory flows and their impact on peace and international relations; strengthening government regulatory capacity in basic services; the impact of natural disasters on stability of food supply; and evaluation of the effects of globalization.

70. The Committee urged Governments to include rural development as a priority item on their policy agendas.

71. The Committee recommended that FAO conduct an interagency examination of the impact of migration on the rural economy.

⁸ LARC/98/3: "Rural Development Strategy as the Focus towards the Reduction of the Extreme Poverty in the Region"

Follow-up to the World Food Summit⁹

72. The Permanent Representative of Chile to FAO reported the conclusions and recommendations of the 24th session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). He mentioned especially the adoption of a follow-up programme until the year 2006, the implementation of the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS), and the standard format for presentation of country reports.

73. The Committee unanimously recognized the work of Ambassador Pedro Medrano as Chairman of the CFS during an important period recently concluded.

74. The Committee took note of the progress made by countries in follow-up to the World Food Summit and emphasized the importance of such progress for achieving food security and social and economic development.

75. The Committee recommended that FAO establish a programme of activities in follow-up to the World Food Summit at regional level and endorsed the decision of the CFS that the FAO Regional Conferences should take place prior to the sessions of the CFS to facilitate an examination of actions pursued at national and regional level.

76. The Committee requested that Governments identify reliable indicators for each commitment of the Plan of Action, particularly those related to access to food. In this regard, implementation of the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS), with interagency co-operation, is of primary importance in focusing on the eradication of extreme poverty and conservation of natural resources.

77. The Committee recommended that Governments step up bilateral co-operation between the countries of the region so as to take advantage of existing capacity and thereby achieve the goals of the Summit's Plan of Action. Donor support would have to be sought to render this initiative viable.

Representation of the Region in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

78. The Committee examined the relevant document¹⁰ and, noting that El Salvador's term as representative of the Region would come to an end in 1998, unanimously elected Dr. Compton Laurence Paul, Executive Secretary of PROCICARIBE, as regional representative in the CGIAR for the period 1999-2002.

⁹ LARC/98/4: "Follow-up to the World Food Summit"

¹⁰ LARC/98/5: "Representation of the Region in the CGIAR"

Other matters: *Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in the Latin American Region*¹¹

79. The Committee highlighted the importance of applying the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in the region in order to conserve resources, to achieve sustainability of fisheries, and to attain food security and social and economic development.

80. The Committee called upon Governments to introduce the Code in legislation and/or make the necessary institutional and policy changes to put it into practice in accordance with national and subregional requirements.

81. The Committee asked that FAO continue to provide technical co-operation and support in identifying funding for implementation of the Code at country level.

82. The Committee recognized the importance of the Fishery Commission for the Western Central Atlantic (WECAFC) for regional co-operation in the management and conservation of fishery resources and as an instrument for application of the Code in the Region.

83. The Committee received with satisfaction the offer of Venezuela to host the next meeting of WECAFC, which, among other matters, would examine implementation of the Code at regional level.

84. The Committee viewed with satisfaction the creation by the FAO Conference of the Margarita Lizárraga Medal in her memory, for her contribution to fisheries in the region. The medal will be awarded to the best work related to application of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

Adoption of the Report

85. The Committee approved the Report after introducing the corresponding modifications.

Closure of the Technical Committee meeting

86. The Chairman of the Technical Committee thanked the delegations for their participation and closed the work of the Committee.

¹¹ LARC/98/INF/6: "Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in the Latin American Region"

FINAL ITEMS

Date, place and items for the Twenty-sixth FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

87. The Conference noted with satisfaction the offer of the delegation of Mexico to host the Twenty-sixth FAO Regional Conference, which would be held in the year 2000, and requested that the Director-General take into account this proposal of the Conference when deciding on the date and place of the event, after consultation with the Government of Mexico. It also welcomed the offer of the Delegation of Cuba to host the Twenty-seventh FAO Regional Conference, which would be held in the year 2002. In this regard, the Conference suggested that at the next Regional Conference, a space be contemplated for informal meetings among Ministers of Agriculture, in order to promote an exchange of ideas on issues of common interest. In addition, the Conference requested that the Secretariat present a main document on the state of agriculture, fisheries and forestry in the Region. This document should be distributed in a timely manner.

88. The Conference requested that FAO include, among others, the following items in the agenda of the next Regional Conference: fisheries; research and technology transfer; food safety and non-tariff barriers; the environment and its relation to production and trade.

Approval of the report

89. The Conference approved the report of the plenary session after introducing the corresponding modifications. Likewise it also approved the report of Technical Committee which is integrated in this document.

Closure of the Conference

90. The Conference thanked the Government and people of The Bahamas for their warm hospitality and for the excellent organization of the meeting.

91. The President closed the 25th Regional Conference and thanked the delegations for their keen participation and for the high level of the deliberations.

STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

*Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Independent Chairman of the Council,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates and Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Seven months ago, the FAO Conference met in Rome where it reviewed the state of food and agriculture in the world and the past and future activities of the Organization.

Although according to the latest estimates the overall world economy grew by a satisfactory rate of approximately 4 percent in 1997, the food and agricultural situation presents contrasting features. Agricultural production only increased by an estimated 1.1 percent and cereal stocks are still below the security threshold. Furthermore, development aid has hovered in recent years at a nominal US \$60 billion, falling both in real terms and in current price. The share of the agricultural sector has fallen from about 30% of development aid in the mid-eighties to barely 12% in recent years.

Prospects for 1998 are mixed. World economic growth is forecast to slowdown significantly, to about 3 percent, mainly reflecting the financial crisis in Asia. There is still great uncertainty about the resolution of the crisis and its worldwide implications, including for food security. As regards prospects for food, a small increase of about 0.7 percent in global staple food production is expected in 1997/98. For the group of low-income food-deficit countries, however, staple food production is forecast to decline by about 2 percent. FAO's latest forecast of 1998 cereal production is 1 911 million tones, marginally above last year's crop and a new record. Should this forecast materialize, cereal supplies would meet expected consumption requirements in 1998/99 but global reserves would continue to remain below minimum safe levels.

FAO's activities in the previous biennium were marked by the World Food Summit held in November 1996. Since then, several initiatives have been undertaken to implement the resulting Plan of Action:

- 150 national strategies for agriculture and food security towards the year 2010 have been drafted with the governments of developing Member Nations and others in transition to market economies;

- the Special Programme for Food Security is now operational in 30 countries, including 3 in the Latin American and Caribbean Region, and under formulation in 40 others, including 6 in the Region;
- the Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases has registered a number of successes at world level, in particular against rinderpest and desert locust; and
- the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information Mapping System has been fully established.

In the important field of multilateral trade negotiations, during the last biennium the Organization continued to help implement the Marrakech agreements by organizing regional workshops and executing national projects. The Organization will also step up its action to assist in the preparation of future trade negotiations, working closely with the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and UNCTAD.

In accordance with the directives adopted by the Summit, FAO has also encouraged at world level the launching of "Food for All" campaigns to mobilize civil society. A number of countries have already initiated a process of national consultation to this effect. The "TeleFood 1997" operation that was broadcast by some one hundred television channels in over 60 countries gave 500 million viewers an added insight into the problems of hunger and malnutrition and laid the foundations of a system for the raising of funds which - already this year - will finance small projects of direct assistance to rural communities in developing countries, helping them boost agricultural production. As endorsed by the last Conference of FAO, TeleFood is to be an annual event to be held within the celebration of World Food Day. The next edition will be held from 16 to 18 October 1998 and will be larger in scale than last year.

Actions for the advancement of women are given priority status in FAO's programmes and projects. In particular, the Special Programme for Food Security should improve the access of rural women to technologies, inputs and credit, which is why special emphasis has been placed on poultry raising and market gardening. To underline the importance of women in the food production chain, the theme chosen for the 1998 World Food Day is "Women Feed the World".

Interagency co-operation for implementing the Summit Plan of Action has also been put in place with the establishment of a Network on Rural Development and Food Security led by FAO and IFAD. The mechanism for monitoring the Summit Plan of Action has also been set up and the Committee on World Food Security has reviewed progress at its recent session.

Finally, as requested by the Conference in November 1997, the Organization is working in the preparation of an International Conference on Agriculture in Small-Island Developing States to be held in Rome in 1999. This is part of the follow-up to the World Food Summit, which recommended to pay special attention to the specific issues and needs of these countries which share a good number of similar economic, social and environmental characteristics. FAO is fully conscious of the concern of the small-island developing states that such a meeting be held urgently in view, in particular, of the World Trade Organization negotiations which are due to begin in 1999. This ministerial conference should also allow small-island nations, among which the Caribbean countries represent a most important group, to discuss national strategies for agricultural development, production diversification, environmental management, sanitary measures and legislation, and policies to deal with agricultural emergencies.

Among the other FAO initiatives with world-wide impact undertaken during the 1996/97 biennium, I should like to mention the following:

- with regard to the sustainable use of natural resources, the adoption of the World Plan of Action of the International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources, the revision of the International Plant Protection Convention and the recent successful completion, in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme, of the negotiation of a legally binding convention on international trade in hazardous chemicals and pesticides;
- as regards forests, programmes focusing on the contribution of forestry to food security, on effective and responsible forest management and on maintaining a balance among the economic, ecological and social benefits of forests; assistance in formulating national forestry programmes; support to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and to the Eleventh World Forestry Congress hosted by Turkey;
- regarding fisheries and aquaculture, the reinforcement of the regional bodies, such as COPESCAL, and the staging of 21 technical consultations on the management of marine fishery resources of different regions, within the framework of the Kyoto Plan of Action on the Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security and the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

The Organization has, of course, continued to pursue its function of collecting, processing, analyzing and disseminating information, for example by publishing the annual report of the State of Food and Agriculture which now includes a section on developments in food security as a follow-up to the Summit. This document is complemented by The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture and State of the World's Forests. The Sixth World Food Survey was published in 1996. As for the long-term world outlook for agriculture and food security, a study will be carried out on the likely scenario until 2015, with a more general evaluation taking us to 2030.

With respect to the dissemination of information, the introduction of new technologies has rationalized and modernized systems, while reducing costs. The World Agricultural Information Centre (WAICENT) now offers ready access to essential information for food security and sustainable rural development: FAO statistical data, FAO textual information and FAO specialized information systems, in particular on animal genetic resources, pesticides and the Global Information and Early Warning System. FAO's site on the Internet is posting over 2 million hits each month and is providing information to English-, Arabic-, Spanish- and French-speaking users.

The Organization has also strengthened coordination and cooperation with its partners to ensure that all its programmes can be implemented against a backdrop of budgetary constraint: with the World Bank and the regional banks through new agreements, mainly for the implementation of the Special Programme for Food Security; with the food and agriculture institutions based in Rome, IFAD and WFP; with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, its Technical Advisory Committee and its institutes; with the other UN agencies under the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination; and with the private sector and the community of non-governmental organizations.

Similarly, cooperation has been stepped up with many Member Nations. Over the past three years, some 1300 experts have been implementing FAO programmes under agreements for co-operation between developing countries and countries in transition and co-operation with academic and research institutions, and by hiring retired experts. In support of the Special Programme for Food Security, a number of South-South co-operation agreements have enabled more advanced developing countries, with FAO assistance, to provide a critical mass of field technicians in the rural communities of other developing countries. So far three countries are already providing such assistance and negotiations are ongoing with 18 others. Finally, with a view to building national capacities, FAO is looking into training opportunities offered by Member Nations in the areas of its mandate for students and trainees from developing countries and will itself employ young professionals, within the limit of available resources, so that they can add practical experience to their academic training.

One of FAO's ongoing concerns is to promote investment in agriculture. In this Region, during the last two years the activity of the Investment Centre made possible the preparation of projects for about US\$ 2.2 billion including external loans for about US\$ 1.35 billion, mainly from the World Bank and IFAD. Approved projects cover most of the agriculture and forestry sector, with a clear concentration in poverty alleviation activities in rural communities; natural resource management including biodiversity conservation; water resources management; land tenure; and forestry development and management.

FAO's Technical Co-operation Programme continues to act as a strong catalyst on account of its defining characteristics of rapid approval, limited project duration, low costs

and practical orientation. A total of 122 projects was under implementation in the Latin American and Caribbean Region in 1996-1997, 16 of which had a regional coverage.

The restructuring of FAO has proceeded under conditions of severe budgetary limitations, with a focus on identifying savings and improving efficiency through decentralization. The number of posts fell from 4185 in January 1994 to 3599 in January 1998. Growing attention is now being given to training staff and raising the contingent of women professionals while continuing to ensure equitable representation of Member Nations: the number of countries not represented among the staff dropped from 54 in January 1994 to 29 in April 1998, taking into account ongoing recruitment.

The decentralization process is nearing completion: all the new liaison and sub-regional offices are open and the Regional Office in Santiago, Chile, has been substantially strengthened. Thanks to this process, there are now 40 professionals working there in comparison to 26 in 1996. The Operations and Policy Assistance Branches have been set up and are now working as decentralized structures. Member Nations coverage by the network of FAO Representatives has been extended through multiple accreditation and the use of National Programme Officers and National Correspondents. At present, 39 percent of the staff is assigned to decentralized offices.

The restructuring process has been accompanied by a delegation of operational, administrative and financial responsibilities to departments at Headquarters and teams in the field, with the establishment of the Management Support Units and tighter audit control in all regional, sub-regional and country offices.

I should like to conclude this overview of the highlights of the last two years by recalling that the Conference approved a Programme of Work and Budget for 1998-99 with zero nominal growth which, in real terms, amounts to a reduction of 3.7 percent. Despite this, however, the Organization has a unanimously endorsed programme which, in contrast to the two previous biennia, will not need adjustment.

I think I can safely say that the Organization has successfully completed its period of reform and that it can now look to the future with confidence and buckle down to its appointed mission of helping to achieve sustainable food security for all.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me now to address the situation of food and agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean and briefly refer to issues of major concern to most countries in the Region.

The Latin American and Caribbean countries are consolidating a new style of development according to global economic changes, the new ways of addressing international relations and the accelerated technological changes which have given way to

the economic and financial globalization. This process is taking place in a political context marked by the spread of democracy in the Region, and in an economic environment that recognizes at the same time the role of the market in the allocation of resources and the responsibilities of the State in ensuring sustainable development and social equity. The old antinomy between public and private sector is being substituted by a more complementary role between them. The State is now expected to favour market development and contribute to its long-term efficiency within a context which guarantees adequate distribution of the financial results of economic growth.

During the biennium 1996-1997 the level of activity in the Region has recovered, with an average growth rate of 5.3 percent of the global GDP during 1997, one of the highest in the last 25 years. In an unstable world economy, the Region was able to diminish its vulnerability to external fluctuations, overcoming the major difficulties derived from problems in other regions. At the same time, domestic stability indicators have improved. Inflation continued to decrease to reach in 1997 a regional average of only 11 percent, the lowest in many decades. Most countries had inflation rates of a single digit. Latin American and Caribbean economies are now much more open, stable and competitive, while making a rapid progress towards their economic and commercial integration.

However, in front of these macroeconomic successes, old challenges persist and have even increased. A feature of utmost concern of the present economic set-up is the growing and social polarization. Economic growth is not accompanied by a more equitable income distribution: estimates of the difference in growth of the per capita income in the Region between 1991 and 1995 show that the top quintile grew by 5% while income of the middle and lower groups grew by only 3%. In several countries, the income concentration has tended to increase (i.e. Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Paraguay and Venezuela). At the same time, the vicious circle of poverty and deterioration of the natural resources base continues to be one of the main problems for the sustainability of development in the Region. At the beginning of this decade, the number of poor people reached an unprecedented level of around 150 million and has not declined since then. In all the countries of the region, the incidence of poverty is much higher in rural areas than in urban ones: more than 50 % of the rural population and around 30% of the urban population live in conditions of poverty or indigence. This poses a serious threat on the region's environment as the rural poor struggle to survive pushing the agricultural frontier to fragile lands and overexploitation of existing plots.

One of the main contrasting issues in the Region refers to food security. Overall, the regional food, agricultural and fisheries production is in surplus. Nevertheless, six countries of the Region do not meet the basic nutritional requirements, and the populations of four others are in a precarious situation, just above the basic nutritional requirements. Moreover, all over the Region a significant part of the population has food access problems due to insufficient income. To a great extent, this is the case of the rural population. While

poverty affects almost one third of the Region's population, in rural areas this proportion reaches almost 55 percent.

FAO has initiated or strengthened a number of important actions as a follow-up to the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the Plan of Action of the World Food Summit, in particular the extension of its Special Programme for Food Security in low-income, food-deficit countries. As I have already mentioned, this programme is aimed at helping these countries to improve their national food security, through rapid increases in productivity and food production on an environmentally and economically sustainable basis. FAO cooperates with the Governments in the formulation and implementation of a country programme based on national ownership and a participatory approach. By favouring small producers and women, the conditions of access to food are also improved.

Unfortunately, during this period the El Niño phenomenon has once more seriously affected twelve countries in the Region, leaving farmers and vulnerable groups exposed to food insecurity. Floods and landslides in Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador, and droughts and forest fires in Brazil, Honduras and Mexico have caused extensive damage to the agricultural infrastructure and losses in the production, as well as disruptive and distortive effects on the local markets..

The integration of national agricultural sectors in regional and international markets has been, and continues to be, an issue of special interest in all the countries of the Region. Despite the progress achieved, concerns still persist on the adjustment of certain productions (basic grains in Central America, poultry in Argentina and Peru, dairy products in Costa Rica, Peru and Uruguay), the impact on employment and income for small producers, the State's ability to soften the negative impacts and promote the sector's competitiveness, and the convenience of deepening or reviewing the level and conditions of the opening of markets. Despite the allocation of public resources to address these issues, in many countries the professional staff and financial resources at the disposal of the Ministries of Agriculture are not sufficient to cover adequately the preparation and active participation of the sector in trade negotiations currently under way, as well as in the implementation of commitments derived from the Uruguay Round, the assessment of their possible impacts, and the design or strengthening of activities to support the subsequent sectoral adjustments. This is a field of great importance in which FAO's technical assistance capacity has special relevance. FAO intends to support and accompany the preparation and evaluation efforts towards the new round of the multilateral agricultural reform process which will be initiated in 1999 under the framework of the World Trade Organization.

In the new context of policy and institutional reforms being pursued by the countries of the Region, the need to strengthen the approach to natural resource management must be highlighted. Forests cover nearly half of the total area of Latin American and Caribbean and represent around a quarter of the world's forestry area. They are, therefore, of vital importance to the economic, social and environmental development of the countries of the

Region but, unfortunately, the natural forest cover continues to decrease in all countries with a loss of over five million hectares per year.

Forestry institutions in the Region are undergoing legal and institutional changes as a result of structural adjustment programmes, of increasing government efforts to address sustainable development, and of the environmental concerns of civil society groups. FAO has collaborated with fourteen countries of the Region in promoting adequate policies and legislation for the management of forest resources, the improvement of regional investment in forestry and the establishment of a regional framework on institutional and policy issues.

The inhabitants of arid and semiarid areas of Latin America and the Caribbean are presently undergoing complex problems regarding the deterioration of their natural resources. In the Region more than 600 million hectares are undergoing a process of desertification or land degradation. This situation is to a great extent due to the improper use of the natural resources of these fragile ecosystems. FAO, jointly with the United Nations Environment Programme, has been assisting countries of the Region in dealing with problems associated with the management of arid and semi-arid lands. Three training courses and three regional consultations have been implemented and National Action Programmes to Combat Desertification have been formulated in the six countries with the largest arid, semiarid and dry sub-humid areas of the Region (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Peru).

Fisheries resources occupy an important place in national and international policy debates in connection with the restructuring of the economic, institutional and political systems towards a sustainable development. Fisheries play a vital role in feeding the world's population, contributing significantly to the dietary protein intake of hundreds of millions of people. Although the development of aquaculture is relatively recent in the Region, its contribution to economic growth is already significant in countries such as Ecuador, Chile, Colombia, Honduras and Mexico; and the sub-sector has great potential for further development. The dynamic role of fisheries in terms of its potential contribution to food security and income and employment generation has been frequently neglected in the past.

An essential tool for the sound and sustainable development of fisheries to which Governments should therefore give priority attention is the management of fisheries through the improvement of fisheries information and statistical data for resource appraisals and sound policy decisions. In so doing, the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries should be used widely as a guideline in the formulation and implementation of fisheries management systems.

Mr. Chairman,

With respect to rural development and poverty alleviation, the challenge is to implement serious reforms to the agrarian policies and institutions in a way that would ensure its consistency with the new policy framework and increase its effectiveness in support of the poor rural population. At the same time, there is a need to respond to increasing domestic and external concerns with respect to the sustainable use of natural resources, not only to preserve the environment, but also as the main source of income for the rural population.

Regarding the institutional reforms, substantial changes are taking place in the operation of government, market and civil society agents. Most countries have initiated an important decentralization of public decision-making and activities. Likewise, there is more complementarity between public action and market mechanisms.

However, this institutional reform process is not restricted to official and governmental institutions. It also involves all the other agents and their inter-relations. It is necessary to promote the various kinds of linkages between the agents, as well as the whole set of rules and conventions agreed between them. It is also essential to reshape the linkage of agricultural production with other economic activities in the rural area, with the systems of technological research and transfer, with the rural financing mechanisms, and with the marketing approaches. There are existing needs, in particular with regard to information on marketing systems, as well as new conditions in the land and water markets

I am confident that the debates of the Conference on this point of the agenda will provide a comprehensive framework for FAO future activities in the Region.

Mr. Chairman,

Overcoming the above challenges calls for the promotion of a paradigm of agricultural and rural development with a broad multi-sectoral base and linkages, and which enhances the opportunities for individuals to develop their full potential as human beings. Development strategies need to be oriented in a manner that will improve the quality of human life, while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems.

For my part, despite the current difficulties, I remain convinced that the economic fundamentals for long-term growth and prospects for the Region are sound. Its leaders have underlined their resolve to achieve sustainable growth, to preserve the dynamism and resilience of the Region, and to unlock the full potential of the people who live here. Without doubt, the Latin American and Caribbean region will continue to play a leading role in the global economy in the years to come.

Thank you for your attention.

APPENDIX B

**PROGRAMME OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
(16 and 17 June 1998)**

I. PRELIMINARY ISSUES

1. Opening of the meeting of the Technical Committee
2. Election of Chairman, Vice-chairmen and designation of Rapporteur
3. Approval of the programme and timetable

II. TECHNICAL ISSUES

4. Multilateral discussions on the reforms of agricultural trade
5. Rural development strategy as the focus towards the reduction of extreme poverty in the Region
6. Follow-up to the World Food Summit
7. Representation of the Region in the GCIAR
8. Other matters

Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in the Latin American Region
9. Approval of the Report
10. Closure of the meeting of the Technical Committee.

**PROGRAMME OF THE PLENARY SESSION
(18 to 20 June 1998)**

I. PRELIMINARY ISSUES

1. Opening ceremony
2. Election of Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and designation of Rapporteur
3. Approval of the programme and timetable

II. STATEMENTS

4. Statement of the Director-General
5. Country statements and general debate on the food and agriculture situation in the Region
6. Report on past activities, current programmes and future priorities for action
7. Follow-up to the World Food Summit
8. Steps for the creation of a Subregional FAO Office for Central America
9. Dates, place and issues of the 26th Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean
10. Other matters
11. Approval of the Report (including the Report of the Technical Committee)
12. Closure of the Conference.

APPENDIX C
APENDICE C

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
LISTA DE PARTICIPANTES

OFFICERS OF THE CONFERENCE
MESA DE LA CONFERENCIA

Chairman Presidente	Earl DEVEAUX (Bahamas)
Vice-Chairmen Vicepresidentes	Luis Freddy CONDE LOPEZ (Bolivia) Carlos MLADINIC (Chile) Peter CARBON (Dominica) Satyadeow SAWH (Guyana) Pedro Arturo SEVILLA GAMERO (Honduras) Fenton FERGUSON (Jamaica) Mario DE FRANCO (Nicaragua) Cayo Antonio FRANCO SAMANIEGO (Paraguay) Cassius ELIAS (Saint Lucia) Reeza MOHAMMED (Trinidad & Tobago) Ramón RAMIREZ LOPEZ (Venezuela)
Rapporteur Relator	Fernando José MARRONI DE ABREU (Brazil)
Independent Chairman of the FAO Council Presidente Independiente del Consejo de la FAO	Sjarifudin Bajarsjah

**OFFICERS OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
MESA DEL COMITE TECNICO**

**Chairman
Presidente**

Earl DEVEAUX
(Bahamas)

**Vice-Chairmen
Vicepresidentes**

Russell GARCIA (Belize)
Luis Freddy CONDE LOPEZ (Bolivia)
Peter CARBON (Dominica)
Satyadeow SAWH (Guyana)
Fenton FERGUSON (Jamaica)
Cayo Antonio FRANCO SAMANIEGO (Paraguay)
Cassius ELIAS (Saint Lucia)
Reeza MOHAMMED (Trinidad & Tobago)

**Rapporteur
Relator**

Fernando José MARRONI DE ABREU (Brazil)

**MEMBER NATIONS SERVICED BY THE REGIONAL OFFICE
ESTADOS MIEMBROS ATENDIDOS POR LA OFICINA REGIONAL**

**ANTIGUA & BARBUDA
ANTIGUA Y BARBUDA**

Head of Delegation

Longford JEREMY
Parliamentary Secretary
Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

Alternates

Lesroy GRANT
Director of Agriculture
Ministry of Agriculture

ARGENTINA

Jefe de Delegación

Alfredo ALCORTA
Embajador
Embajada de Argentina en Jamaica

BAHAMAS

Head of Delegation

Earl DEVEAUX
Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Alternates

Colin HIGGS
Under-Secretary
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Rodella TYNES
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Carl SMITH
Director of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture

Michael BRAYNEN
Director
Department of Fisheries

Simeon PINDER
Acting Deputy Director
Department of Agriculture

Cecil DORSETT
Assistant Director
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

John HAMMERTON
Assistant Director
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Gwendolyn HAMMERTON
Department of Agriculture

Brickell SIMMS
Senior Agricultural Economist
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Fern SPRINGER
Senior Agricultural Officer
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Keith DALEY
Senior Food Technologist
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Leon SMITH
Senior Agricultural Officer
Department of Agriculture

Gregory RAMIREZ
Senior Chemist
Department of Agriculture

Leslie MINNS
Senior Marketing Officer
Department of Agriculture

Andrew PINDER
Livestock Officer
Department of Agriculture

Dereo MAYCOCK
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

BARBADOS

Head of Delegation

Lyall Winston SMALL
Chief Agricultural Officer
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural
Development

Alternates

Errol BABB
Projects Director
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural
Development

BELIZE BELICE

Head of Delegation

Russell GARCIA
Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Alternates

René J. MONTERO
Acting Chief Agriculture Officer
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

BOLIVIA

Jefe de Delegación

Luis Freddy CONDE LÓPEZ
Ministro de Agricultura, Ganadería y
Desarrollo Rural
Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y
Desarrollo Rural

Suplentes

Alberto Rubén CASTRO ZILVETTY
Secretario Permanente
Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria

BRAZIL

BRASIL

Head of Delegation

Julio GOMES DOS SANTOS
Ambassador. Permanent Representative of
Brazil to FAO
Permanent Representation of Brazil to FAO

Alternates

Fernando José MARRONI DE ABREU
Alternate Permanent Representative
Permanent Representation of Brazil to FAO

CHILE

Head of Delegation

Carlos MLADINIC
Ministro de Agricultura
Ministerio de Agricultura

Suplentes

Pedro MEDRANO ROJAS
Embajador - Representante Permanente de
Chile ante la FAO
Representación Permanente de Chile ante la
FAO

Sergio RAMOS
Director de Relaciones Internacionales
Ministerio de Agricultura

Ricardo LEÓN
Coordinador Diplomático
Ministerio de Agricultura

COLOMBIA

Jefe de Delegación

Carlos Fernando BARCO MORA
Viceministro de Coordinación de Políticas
Ministerio de Agricultura y Desarrollo
Rural

Suplentes

María de los Angeles TOVAR
CHAVARRO
Dirección General de Política Sectorial
Ministerio de Agricultura y Desarrollo
Rural

COSTA RICA

Jefe de Delegación

Luis Ignacio CAMPOS
Jefe de Asesores del Ministro
Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería

CUBA

Jefe de Delegación

Alfredo GUTIERREZ YANIS
Viceministro de Agricultura
Ministerio de la Agricultura

Suplentes

Juan NUIRY SÁNCHEZ
Embajador de Cuba ante la FAO
Embajada de Cuba ante la FAO

Marcos I. NIETO LARA
Subdirector. Director de Relaciones
Internacionales
Ministerio de Agricultura

Ileana NÚÑEZ MORDOCHE
Funcionaria
Dirección de Organismos Económicos
Internacionales
Ministerio para la Inversión Extranjera y
Colaboración Económica

DOMINICA

Head of Delegation

Peter CARBON
Minister for Agriculture
Ministry of Agriculture and the
Environment

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
REPUBLICA DOMINICANA**

Jefe de Delegación

Suplentes

Juan José ESPINAL
Subsecretario de Planificación Sectorial
Secretaría de Agricultura

ECUADOR

Jefe de Delegación

Adib RAMADAN RAMADAN
Director de Asuntos Internacionales
Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería

Suplentes

Ana CORREA RODRÍGUEZ
Analista de Programación de la Dirección
de Planificación
Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería

EL SALVADOR

Jefe de Delegación

Vilma HERNÁNDEZ DE CALDERÓN
Viceministra de Agricultura y Ganadería
Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería

GUATEMALA

Jefe de Delegación

Luis Alberto CASTAÑEDA AMAYA
Viceministro de Agricultura y Alimentación
Ministerio de Agricultura y Alimentación

Suplentes

Jaime CARRERA
Asistente del Viceministro de Agricultura y
Alimentación
Ministerio de Agricultura y Alimentación

GUYANA

Head of Delegation

Satyadeow SAWH
Minister for Fisheries, Crops and Livestock
Ministry of Fisheries, Crops and Livestock

HAITI

Head of Delegation

Jean DRICE
Chief of Staff to the Minister of Agriculture
Chef de Cabinet
Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources
and Rural Development

Alternates

Emmanuel PROPHETE
Researcher
Ministry of Agriculture

Suze PERCY
Permanent Representative of Haiti to FAO
Permanent Representation of Haiti to FAO

HONDURAS

Jefe de Delegación

Pedro Arturo SEVILLA GAMERO
Ministro de Agricultura y Ganadería
Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería

Alternates

Jaime José SALINAS SARAVIA
Director de Planificación y Evaluación
Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería

José Roberto VILLEDA TOLEDO
Asesor del Ministro
Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería

JAMAICA

Head of Delegation

Fenton FERGUSON
Minister of State
Ministry of Agriculture

Alternates

Olivia Marie STRACHAN
Senior Director of Planning and
Development Division
Ministry of Agriculture

MEXICO

Jefe de Delegación

Andrés CASCO FLORES
Subsecretario de Planeación
Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería y
Desarrollo Rural

Suplentes

Mario MOYA PALENCIA
Representante Permanente de México ante
la FAO
Embajada de México ante la FAO

José ROBLES-AGUILAR
Representante Permanente Adjunto de
México ante la FAO
Embajada de México ante la FAO

Elías REYES BRAVO
Subdirector para Naciones Unidas de la
Dirección General de Asuntos
Internacionales
Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería y
Desarrollo Rural

Andrés ROSENZWEIG PICHARDO
Director General de Estudios del Sector
Agropecuario
Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería y
Desarrollo Rural

NICARAGUA

Jefe de Delegación

Mario DE FRANCO
Ministro de Agricultura
Ministerio de Agricultura

Suplentes

Alfonso SANDINO
Asesor Personal del Ministro de Agricultura
Ministerio de Agricultura

PARAGUAY

Jefe de Delegación

Cayo Antonio FRANCO SAMANIEGO
Ministro de Agricultura y Ganadería
Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería

PERU

Jefe de Delegación

Ana María DEUSTUA
Embajadora y Representante Permanente de
Perú ante la FAO
Embajada de Perú ante la FAO

Suplentes

Josefina TAKAHASHI
Jefe de la Unidad de Gestión de Contratos
Internacionales
Ministerio de Agricultura

SAINT LUCIA SANTA LUCIA

Head of Delegation

Cassius ELIAS
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry
and the Environment
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry
and the Environment

SURINAME

Head of Delegation

Jaswant SAHTOE
Coordinator Agricultural Research
Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry
and Fisheries

Alternates

Gerrit BREINBURG
Coordinator of Planning and Development
Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry
and Fisheries

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO TRINIDAD Y TABAGO

Head of Delegation

Reeza MOHAMMED
Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine
Resources
Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine
Resources

Alternates

Edwina LEACOCK
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine
Resources

URUGUAY

Jefe de Delegación

Ignacio ZORRILLA
Subsecretario de Ganadería, Agricultura y
Pesca
Ministerio de Ganadería, Agricultura y
Pesca

Suplentes

Martín DURÁN MARTÍNEZ
Coordinador de la Unidad de Proyecto y
Cooperación Técnica
Ministerio de Ganadería, Agricultura y
Pesca

Raúl OLAGÜE
Presidente
Instituto Nacional de Alimentación

Carmen BETANCOURT
Nutricionista
Instituto Nacional de Alimentación

Joseline MARTÍNEZ
Nutricionista
Instituto Nacional de Alimentación

VENEZUELA

Jefe de Delegación

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Ministro de Agricultura y Cría
Ministerio de Agricultura y Cría

Suplentes

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Secretario Técnico del Consejo Nacional de
la Alimentación

Haydée José HERNÁNDEZ ARCAAY
Directora Técnica
Instituto Agrario Nacional

Arturo TINEO RODRÍGUEZ
Jefe División de Mercadeo Agrícola
Externo
Ministerio de Agricultura y Cría

Virginia PEREZ PEREZ
Segundo Secretario
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores

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USDA

Richard HELM
Director
International Organizations Division
USDA

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Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to FAO

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Adviser

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PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL DESARROLLO***

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Resident Representative of the UNDP in Jamaica

***WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME
PROGRAMA MUNDIAL DE ALIMENTOS***

James CONWAY
Director
World Food Programme

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ORGANIZACION INTERNACIONAL DEL TRABAJO (OIT)***

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Deputy Director
International Labour Organization
Caribbean Office - Trinidad

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Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute
Trinidad

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Caribbean Community Secretariat
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Consejo Regional de Cooperación Agrícola - CORECA
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Operations Specialist
Inter-American Development Bank
The Bahamas

***INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION ON AGRICULTURE (IICA)
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Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
Costa Rica

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Director Ejecutivo
Organismo Internacional Regional de Sanidad Agropecuaria
El Salvador

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ORGANIZACION LATINOAMERICANA DE DESARROLLO PESQUERO (OLDEPESCA)***

Carlos MAZAL
Director Ejecutivo
OLDEPESCA

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COMISION PERMANENTE DEL PACIFICO SUR (CPPS)***

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Secretario General Adjunto, Asuntos Científicos
Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur
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Asociación Latinoamericana de Avicultura, Chile

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Gustavo GORDILLO DE ANDA	Assistant Director-General Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean Subdirector General Representante Regional para América Latina y el Caribe
Joseph JOHNSON	Subregional Representative for the Caribbean Representante Subregional para el Caribe
Julio PAZ CAFFERATA	Chief Policy Assistance Branch Jefe de la Subdirección de Asistencia para las Políticas Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean Oficina Regional para América Latina y el Caribe
Alejandro SCHEJTMAN	Senior Policy Officer Oficial Principal de Políticas Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean Oficina Regional para América Latina y el Caribe
Bisessar CHAKALALL	Regional Fisheries Officer Oficial Regional de Pesca Subregional Office for the Caribbean Oficina Subregional para el Caribe

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SECRETARIA DE LA CONFERENCIA**

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Secretario de la Conferencia

Carlos ARELLANO SOTA

Conference Affairs Officer
Oficial de Asuntos de la Conferencia

David BOWEN

Report Officer
Oficial de Informe

Cecilio MORON

Press Officer
Oficial de Prensa

Germán ROJAS

Communications Officer
Oficial de Comunicaciones

David DION

APPENDIX D
APENDICE D

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

LARC/98/1-Corr.1	Provisional Annotated Agenda
LARC/98/2	Multilateral Discussions on the Reforms of Agricultural Trade
LARC/98/3	Rural Development Strategy as the Focus Towards the Reduction of Extreme Poverty in the Region
LARC/98/4	Follow-up to the World Food Summit
LARC/98/5	Representation of the Region in the CGIAR

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LARC/98/INF/1	Information Note
LARC/98/INF/2-Corr.1	Provisional Timetable
LARC/98/INF/3-Corr.1	Provisional List of Documents
LARC/98/INF/4	Statement of the Director General
LARC/98/INF/5-Corr.1	Report on Past Activities, Present Programmes and Priorities in the Region
LARC/98/INF/6	Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in the Latin American Region

