

Press Release No. 25- Food Monitor Program

Government requires Cubans to seek their own food and do without the basic food basket

Havana, June 26, 2024

During a visit to the Naranjo Popular Council in Majibacoa municipality (Las Tunas), the president and first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), Miguel Díaz Canel, affirmed that there was “enough land” in the locality to produce their own food and called for “working hard” to achieve food self-sufficiency instead of “thinking about what is going to come in through the food basket”.

At the same time that the Cuban government publicizes the scope of food security in the form of laws and decrees, it stresses the idea that the responsibility for satisfying the basic needs of the citizens remains in the hands of the citizens themselves and of the local governments. This was the ruler's conclusion during his visit: “We have to reach the moment when this country becomes self-sufficient in food. That is what will give us security, really. We will not be dependent on imports. But we have to believe in that. And each municipality has to grow its own food”.

This is not the first time that the administration's discourse calls for a sort of “every man for himself”, as the multifactorial crisis in Cuba deepens. Previously, in the National Assembly, it had been suggested that each Committee for the Defense of the Revolution plant a pineapple: “If a single CDR member can think of planting a pineapple; just one per CDR, how many pineapples are we talking about? 138,000 pineapples (...) Although the enemy mocks initiatives like these, the same people who support the blockade and want to surrender us are mocking”, argued the then vice president of the CDRs, an archaic structure of neighborhood vigilance. Before the same conclave, in the midst of the worsening water insecurity in the country, the Cuban vice prime minister Jorge Luis Tapia had proposed raising fish in neighborhood ponds, for the self-consumption of families.

In short, in view of the lack of administrative strategy and the profound failure of the Tarea Ordenamiento¹, from which more than 80% of the families have lost considerable

¹ <https://www.foodmonitorprogram.org/inseguridad-alimentaria-2023>

access to food, the governmental response has been to recycle the survival strategies of the Special Period, which date back more than thirty years ago. To this end, it resorts to flowery language, presenting these precarious exercises as “creative initiatives” that are part of “family agriculture”.

In view of this evidence, the Food Monitor Program considers it necessary to put into perspective several warnings:

- National governments have an obligation to guarantee the basic food basket in a sufficiently healthy and safe food group extension, as well as its accessible marketing and constant distribution: avoiding such responsibility is a violation of the right to food, described by FAO as the right of every person to feed themselves with dignity. Furthermore, it is a clear sign of the lack of governmental will to impact the nation's food security.

- Although the government promotes self-sufficiency, included as one of the pillars of the right to food, it is a completely illusory and ineffective position in the Cuban context: The Cuban economy is centrally planned and planned. Ordinary Cubans do not have the space, resources or raw materials to produce their own food. Cuba is a country that barely imports or produces feed and fertilizers, where water is scarce, and where urban infrastructure is in danger of being compromised by animal husbandry or vegetable plantations.²

- The promotion of laws and decrees on food and nutritional security are not enough: They are a banal and declaratory exercise of supposed good intentions that have neither been designed with pragmatism and according to the Cuban context, nor have they been carried out efficiently. It is merely an exercise of legitimization of the Government towards the outside world, which is not very credible considering that since this month Cuba appears for the first time in the UNICEF annals on child food poverty.

² We recall that in the 1990s Fidel Castro had to self-correct and condemn the possession of captive animals for family consumption, since they were kept in urban areas and compromised neighborhood hygiene.

- The recycling of a progressive discourse of sovereignty and resistance in a context of food precariousness without productive norms or compliance channels, is an exercise of state control and repression: It keeps citizens in a state of vulnerability, social unprotection and dependence, while the political power itself calls for resistance, monopolizing the voice of the people and distorting their fragile reality.

- The agricultural sector is the largest employer in the country, but this does not mean that it has the potential to replace imports. Investments and packages of measures developed in the last five years have not stopped the debacle in national food production, which has declined up to 67% in this period.

Food Monitor Program warns of the serious consequences of the decline in agrifood indicators, as well as the secrecy, bureaucracy and narrative paraphernalia with which the authorities handle official statistics and their tendency to an evasive and revictimizing discourse. It also urges the government to take measures to curb the sustained advance of food insecurity in the country, as well as its social, cultural, economic and political aggravations.