

COVID19 and Impacts on Food Security in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS

Virtual conversation
Organized by OHRLLS and FAO

7 May 2020 from 3 – 4.30 pm

Statement by H.E. Ms. Lois Young, Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Let me begin by thanking OHRLLS and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for convening this timely virtual briefing on the impacts of COVID-19 on food security in SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs. While we all acknowledge that this crisis has widespread global implications, it is important to recognize that our countries are disproportionately affected.

The Effect of COVID-19 on SIDS

2. Since the Barbados Programme of Action, the international community has recognized that food security and nutrition are persistent challenges in SIDS. With limited resource base, geographic insularity, and susceptibility to natural disasters, small island economies disproportionately rely on global markets for food supply with some 50% of SIDS importing more than 80% of their food. As COVID-19 unfolds, we are alarmed that our islands now face the prospect of a major food security crisis.

3. SIDS' core revenue-generating industries have come to a standstill. The result is a major, and frightening loss of foreign exchange, stymying our ability to access international markets, and further exacerbated by a dramatic decrease in remittances to the majority of our countries... With food imports representing more than 15% of all merchandise imports for small island economies (which is twice the world average), the shrinking tourism revenues and remittance flows will result in the rise in outflows to service debt and paying for food imports in SIDS.

4. Many other sectors in the economy have also been indirectly but significantly impacted. Disruptions to domestic food supply chains, an unprecedented increase in unemployment resulting in greatly diminished purchasing power, constitute a chain of stressors pressuring our countries. The combined effect of these multiple stressors compromises food security in SIDS coupled with numerous socio-economic consequences.

5. At this point I would like to thank Mr. Torero and Ms. Daza from the FAO for their presentation which highlighted these issues, and also express our gratitude to the FAO for their efforts to analyze and address the challenges that we face in our countries.

Addressing food security implications of COVID-19 in SIDS

6. Now, more than ever, we need international unity and solidarity to ensure that the most vulnerable countries do not fall deeper into poverty even as we address this crisis. As Mr. Torero has previously stated¹, *“All measures against free trade will be counterproductive. Now is not the time for restrictions or putting in place trade barriers. Now is the time to protect the flow of food around the world.”* The lifting of barriers is particularly relevant for countries such as Cuba, who face unilateral coercive measures inhibiting their ability effectively to address the challenges arising from COVID-19.

7. Food supply chains need to be adjusted at all levels, nationally and internationally to ensure access is still maintained, even with restrictions in mobility. The response and recovery from COVID-19 also provides an opportunity to reevaluate supply chains and reduce food wastage where possible, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 12.

8. Stimulus packages can also incorporate support to climate smart domestic agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries, which will, in the long term, enhance food

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/mar/26/coronavirus-measures-could-cause-global-food-shortage-un-warns>

security and help diversify the economy. Our goal should be to emerge from this crisis as more sustainable and resilient communities, able to withstand future crises.

9. As you are well aware, the main challenge we face in our response is the lack of resources. Food security must per force take the priority, but there are numerous other widespread socio-economic implications taking a severe toll on our fiscal budgets. At a granular and systemic level, we need the support of the international community and financial institutions in order to respond and recover, without falling even deeper into debt and compromising our sustainable development.

AOSIS looks forward to working closely with the FAO in addressing the food security related issues in SIDS, and also with the OHRLLS in addressing the broader but interrelated economic and financial implications of COVID-19.

Thank you.