

Address by His Excellency Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, First Vice-President of the Councils of State and Ministers for the Round Table named “Sustainable Development: the Environment, Climate Change and Energy”.

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Your Excellency,

At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro 16 years ago, Fidel Castro uttered a prophetic warning, stating that “an important biological species is at risk of disappearing as a result of the rapid and progressive destruction of its natural living conditions: humanity”. Time has proven him right.

Let us not mince our words: we shan’t attain sustainable development, the negative impacts of climate change will neither be halted or reversed, the environment will not be preserved for future generations, if the irrational patterns of production, distribution and consumption imposed upon us by capitalism prevail. The globalization of neo-liberal policies has drastically exacerbated the crisis.

Facing the vital crisis that threatens humanity today cannot consist in preventing the development of those who need development the most. We have common, albeit differentiated, responsibilities. Those who have unjustly and selfishly hoarded riches and technologies, who are responsible for 76 percent of greenhouse gas emissions since 1850, must bear most of the weight of this effort.

Developed countries must honour the commitments assumed at Kyoto in connection with the mitigation of this phenomenon and, in addition to this, mobilize additional resources to aid in adaptation efforts undertaken in South countries.

If, for instance, the United States were to reallocate, as official aid for sustainable development, a small portion of its military budget for the 2008 fiscal year, a budget which reaches the astronomical figure of 696 billion dollars, a vital contribution to this effort could be made. European Union countries — several of which register the highest military budgets on the planet—could be the first to take steps in this direction and steer their main ally to follow in their footsteps.

A growing number of countries can no longer afford to pay the price of many food products. Hunger continues to claim lives and the situation is getting worse. The sinister plans to convert food into fuel advanced by the President of the United States must be combated on the strength of scientific arguments and the unquestionable evidence and eloquent facts afforded us by everyday life.

Sustainable development presupposes a revolution in our values and in the way we confront the inequalities of today and the challenges of tomorrow. We must undertake a global energy revolution sustained by savings, rationality and efficiency.

Cuba hopes the members of the European Union shall assume their duties. The responsible conduct of its members shall serve to expedite the assumption, by the rest of developed countries, of the commitment to reduce their greenhouse emissions, by 2020, by no less than 40 percent in relation to their 1990 levels.

The European Union, a world leader in the production of clean technologies and the export of renewable energy sources, is in a position to create a mechanism for the transfer of these technologies, under completely preferential conditions, to the countries of Latin America, the Caribbean and the rest of the Third World.

I will mention but one example: the generosity of the people and government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and initiatives such as PETROCARIBE and ALBA are an example that ought to be followed by the European Union.

The time is ripe for acting, in the spirit of solidarity, and without demagogy.

Thank you very much.