



REFUTING THE CUBAN STATEMENTS AT THE WORLD FOOD FORUM

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On October 16, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) celebrated its 80th anniversary. Since its creation, this body has pursued the eradication of hunger and malnutrition and the promotion of food security worldwide.

On the occasion of this eight-decade milestone, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez sent a message to the World Food Forum, inaugurated on October 13 at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy. In his address, the Cuban leader claimed that the island and FAO share “common goals such as the eradication of hunger, agricultural transformation, and sustainable rural development,” and that both work to achieve these objectives “without leaving anyone behind.” He also stated that the establishment of FAO’s official representation in Cuba in 1978 marked “a key cooperation effort to strengthen food security and sustainable rural development.” Moreover, Díaz-Canel asserted that FAO has played a vital role in “building and implementing public policies to transform local food systems, including the Law on Food Sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security.”

However, the Cuban president omitted in his speech that his own government is the first to violate the national Food Sovereignty Law, having failed to ensure that Cuba produces food sustainably and that its population has access to sufficient, diverse, balanced, nutritious, safe, and healthy food, as well as to potable water. In fact, Díaz-Canel’s falsehoods at the World Food Forum are easily verifiable.

First, it is impossible for Cuba to advance toward food sovereignty when the country imports nearly 80% of its food, as acknowledged by Alberto López Díaz, Minister of the Food Industry, and Betsy Díaz Velázquez, Minister of Domestic Trade, among other government representatives. The need to import food and raw materials stems, among other factors, from the government’s longstanding policy of prioritizing the hotel industry over the agri-food sector. Official figures reported by the National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI) show that in 2024, 37.4% of state expenditures went to tourism, while only 3.4% was distributed among agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fisheries — a figure that fell to 2.4% in the first half of 2025.

At the same time, food insecurity in Cuba has risen drastically in the past five years as a result of failed government policies and numerous distortions in its economic programs.

Various measures, including the growing dollarization of the economy—without adequate banking support—have contributed to inflation levels nearing 70% and have tripled prices over the past five years. As a result, purchasing power has plummeted, and the cost of the basic food basket has soared. Because the government has failed to ensure a national agricultural production

capable of providing at least basic foodstuffs, Cubans have been forced to rely on imported products sold by small and medium-sized private enterprises (MSMEs), which have effectively taken over the role of suppliers amid state neglect.

In numbers, this means that the minimum pension for retirees (3,056 CUP)—as of September this year—amounts to less than USD 7 on the informal market. According to the official newspaper *Granma*, that amount barely buys a carton of 30 eggs. Meanwhile, a state worker earning the minimum wage (2,100 CUP) cannot even afford that. According to Food Monitor Program estimates, the cost of the basic food basket in Cuba for one person is about 21,000 CUP—that is, the equivalent of ten minimum wages, more than three average salaries, or three minimum pensions. These figures clearly demonstrate that the Cuban government is neither eradicating hunger nor food insecurity, and is, in fact, leaving millions of people behind.

Water, Energy, and Food Insecurity

Three other factors that contribute to food insecurity on the island are the lack of access to potable water, the scarcity of energy sources for cooking, and the prolonged, recurrent electricity blackouts.

In 2024, the World Bank Group estimated that only 50 percent of the Cuban population had access to safe drinking water, while other estimates indicate that more than 40 percent lack a stable supply. The problem is widespread across the country. Periods of drought are compounded by a deteriorating infrastructure, fuel shortages that prevent the operation of water pumps, and continuous power outages. Even official media have reported, for example, that in Havana up to 70 percent of the water pumped is lost through leaks and ruptures in the pipes.

This situation prevents many Cubans from maintaining adequate food hygiene or even from having basic water to cook or drink. It also forces households to spend part of their limited income on purchasing water from third parties—often through bribing water-truck operators—thereby further reducing the funds available for food.

The energy crisis likewise undermines food security. The lack of electricity and cooking gas severely restricts millions of households that are unable to prepare their meals by other means. This has not only increased their household expenses—since they must now buy alternative fuels such as charcoal or firewood—but has also led to a rise in respiratory illnesses, as many dwellings are not large or well-ventilated enough to dissipate the gases produced during combustion.

The electricity cuts themselves affect access to water, cooking, and the storage of cooked and perishable food. Within a single year, Cuba has suffered four nationwide blackouts lasting more than 24 hours, some reaching 72 consecutive hours. On ordinary days, outages range from 12 to 22 hours daily, reaching up to 36 hours in certain areas. This frequently causes the spoilage of the few food items that hundreds of thousands of Cubans manage—often with great difficulty—to obtain or cook.

In addition, numerous refrigeration and cooking appliances have been damaged by voltage instability and unscheduled power cuts and reconnections, preventing people from taking preventive measures to protect their equipment. Thousands of Cubans have had to pay out of

pocket for repairs or replacements, since the Unión Eléctrica, responsible for electricity service nationwide, does not compensate for such damage. Nor does the government offer victims access to repair workshops at affordable prices or stores in national currency with prices compatible with state wages and pensions.

Although the government has publicly admitted—on national television—that Cuba faces a severe food, water, and energy crisis, state investments in these sectors continue to be sidelined in favor of tourism. Cuban economist Pedro Monreal pointed out that in 2023, in Havana alone, ten times more state resources were allocated to hotel construction than to electricity, gas, and water supply combined. Even though, two years later, the authorities have shifted attention toward these three crisis-ridden sectors—now accounting for 34.3 percent of the state budget—this level of investment remains insufficient.

International Reports and Government Accountability

Meanwhile, international organizations such as UNICEF and independent observatories like the Cuban Observatory of Human Rights (OCDH) have begun to dismantle the long-standing myth of food security in Cuba.

UNICEF's 2024 reports documented severe child food poverty affecting 9 percent of Cuban children—meaning that many under-five-year-olds lack more than half of the eight essential nutritional groups required for a healthy life. At the same time, data collected by the OCDH—alongside other studies conducted by Food Monitor Program—show that 88 percent of the Cuban population lives in extreme poverty and over 70 percent lack the resources to eat three meals a day (breakfast, lunch, and dinner). Food Monitor Program has also warned about the “hidden hunger” prevailing in the country and the clinical impact of malnutrition on the health of Cubans living on the island.

The government's official justification for the crisis—repeated by Díaz-Canel in his speech at the World Food Forum—is the economic sanctions imposed by the United States. However, the president failed to mention that trade between the two countries has existed since 2000, under the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act, which authorizes agricultural and humanitarian sales to Cuba. Between January and May 2025, the Cuban government imported agricultural and food products worth USD 204.9 million from the U.S.—a 16.6 percent increase compared to the same period the previous year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These imports included chicken, rice, powdered milk, coffee, and pork.

Food Monitor Program therefore calls attention to the falsehoods contained in Miguel Díaz-Canel's speech at the World Food Forum and in other international venues, as well as to the lack of transparency in data released by Cuban official entities, which hampers—and distorts—the work of organizations such as FAO itself.

Cuba's food crisis—sustained and deepened by its energy shortage and water stress—worsens daily under a government that offers no tangible solutions, not even long-term ones. Hunger is on the rise, especially among vulnerable groups such as the elderly, with increasingly severe consequences for public health.

It is imperative that the Cuban government cease blaming the U.S. embargo for the country's internal situation and begin acknowledging its own economic and governance failures. This would be a first step toward assuming the responsibilities that, as a State and government, it owes to the Cuban people—namely, to design and implement strategies that guarantee basic human rights such as the right to food.