



CUBA AT THE UN: OFFICIAL DISCOURSE MASKS DOMESTIC FOOD CRISIS

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At the recent Second United Nations Summit on Food Systems, held in Addis Ababa, the Cuban government reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening sustainable food policies on the international stage. Vice Prime Minister Jorge Luis Tapia Fonseca declared that “Cuba is willing to help position food systems at the center of socioeconomic development agendas to combat hunger, poverty, and inequality” (*Granma*, July 29, 2025).

However, this statement stands in stark contrast to the current food situation on the island. At the Food Monitor Program (FMP), we are deeply concerned about the growing disconnect between the Cuban state’s discourse in multilateral forums and the reality documented by independent organizations, community actors, and individuals affected by chronic food insecurity. We share below some key points of concern.

A Deep Gap Between Narrative and Reality

Cuba’s food system is undergoing a prolonged crisis, marked by:

- a dependence on imports (over 80% of total food supply),
- a sharp decline in domestic production (an estimated drop of more than 67% in the past decade),
- and a dollarization and privatization process that restricts access to basic goods for those without remittances or access to foreign currency.

In this context, concepts like “*food sovereignty*” or “*creative resistance*”, as well as newly passed laws supposedly aimed at “*food security*”, serve more as a smokescreen than a solution, masking the country’s actual food precarity while projecting a government will that is largely nonexistent. Meanwhile, the persistence of centralized policies, lack of transparency, and absence of meaningful community participation continue to hinder progress toward a just, equitable, and rights-based food system.

Some key indicators:

- 96% of households surveyed by FMP have reported decreased access to adequate food in recent years.
- 29% of these households eat only twice a day, and 4% just once.
- 98.8% reported unsustainable increases in the prices of basic food products.

- More and more families are forced to reduce the variety and quality of their meals due to the unaffordability of fresh or protein-rich foods.

Institutional Criminalization of Survival Strategies

A recent and alarming institutional trend has been the criminalization of extreme poverty and popular subsistence strategies. People living on the street, families turning to the informal market, and independent community projects have been subject to discredit, harassment, or sanctions.

In contrast, state-run programs to address undernutrition and food insecurity have been largely symbolic, increasingly inconsistent, and limited in scope, falling far short of meeting standards of universality or equity in food access.

Contribution to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

This year, Food Monitor Program submitted a detailed report to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, highlighting the centralization of Cuba's food system under GAESA, a military conglomerate that controls imports, foreign exchange, commercial chains, and logistics networks—without public oversight or citizen participation.

GAESA has consciously platformized food access as a means of extracting foreign currency, effectively turning the Cuban diaspora into a captive market. This rent-seeking logic upheld by Cuba's military elite discourages investment in domestic production in favor of food imports. At the same time, GAESA's monopoly over imports and distribution severely limits ordinary Cubans' access to basic goods, especially when these are sold in foreign currencies out of reach for most.

Moreover, GAESA controls agricultural inputs, foreign currency flows, and logistics networks—illustrating a corporatization of food policy that undermines autonomous initiatives and the vitality of the national economy, to the benefit of elite enrichment.

The report also underscores the lack of accountability and transparency mechanisms, as well as the criminalization of informal distribution networks, independent farmers, and community-led projects. It echoes concerns from international bodies over Cuba's rhetorical use of the SDGs and sustainable development language to uphold exclusionary, opaque, and top-down structures.

Final Call to International Actors

For all these reasons, FMP calls on international agencies, institutions, and allies to critically examine the Cuban government's official discourse on food policy. We urge the recognition and support of independent actors who, often at risk, document and denounce the ongoing crisis. We also advocate for linking technical and financial cooperation to

concrete guarantees of non-politicized food access, and for strengthening monitoring mechanisms of the right to food in authoritarian or structurally exclusionary contexts.