

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

Speech of the Minister of the Environment, Housing, and Territorial Development



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Minister of the Environment,
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Development

First Latin American Meeting of
the Roundtable on Sustainable
Palm Oil, RSPO

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Good morning. A very respectful greeting to all; to the President and the Secretary General of the RSPO we extend a warm welcome to this country which has awaited them with excitement and enthusiasm. A extend very respectful and brotherly greeting to our dear friend, Jens Mesa, and all his associates in the Fedepalma board, to whom we thank for their efforts and leadership which has made a meeting as important as this one possible.

On behalf of our president Alvaro Uribe, our government expresses a warm welcome to all the attendees from neighboring countries, brother countries, those palm producing countries visiting us, to whom we wish to express that here in Colombia we welcome them with enthusiasm, that in this country in exercise of a collective leadership, we have been overcoming enormous difficulties that had been grieving our countrymen, and we have become a territory of peace, fertile for investment, pleasant to visit, open relationships with a territory of progress; we express that you are very welcome to Colombia, and to our palm growers' countrymen, in each of their various links in the chain, we wish to greet them and thank them for their presence, their effort and their support in this cause. We extend a warm greeting to Carlos Murgas, ex-minister, to the president of Cecodes and to all our associates in these tasks

As we had the opportunity to point out, we have awaited the RSPO meeting with many expectations and much enthusiasm, The First Latin-American Meeting of The Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil.



This is a country that has bet on Palm. We have a conviction in the government for the goodness and benefits that the sustainable and responsible palm industry brings to our country and our future.

Here, cherished foreign visitors, president Uribe and his entire government team believe in prosperity for the private sector, in private investment; we believe that the proper way to overcome poverty, to improve the threshold of life of our countrymen, begins with a guarantee of trust on a fraternal and socially responsible investment and on a profitable investment.

We, and we state it without blushing - with full conviction, are fond of the accumulated statements of losses and gains, we like for companies to make money, for investments to be compensated with benefits to the investors. We, dear president of the RSPO, in the pyramid of *People, Planet and Profits*, believe in *Profits* in order to advance in the improvement of the living conditions of countries; and we therefore bet on guaranteeing proper conditions for profitability, providing trust to investors, offering in a juridical and financial manner, as possibility allows according to our fiscal limitations, for those who bet on a palm industry sector, abundant manifestations and proof of this commitment from the National Government, such as the design of a system of fiscal stimuli for late yielding crops, a permanent expression of solidarity with the good and honest palm growers that have difficulty with the Cogollo Spear Rot disease; there are, in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, colleagues working beside palm growers in order to confront these difficult situations and to guarantee that they remain in the sector.

We, from this perspective, understand, as does the RSPO, that the success of these initiatives, in good measure, lies in the capacity to have a very fluid dialogue between the official instances, the producers and the communities. We require here that all those that participate, as the president has wisely stated, listen and be willing to be heard, and to tend from constructive dialogue to the conclusions, in order for the route to be safe and adequate.

Within this vision, we of course understand with the P of *Planet* that this requires, as Fedepalma has demonstrated, the unwavering commitment to environmental sustainability. I gather in a permanent manner the

definition of sustainability which I have always heard after having read and reread and gathered hundreds of definitions; I will bestow the *Copyright* on the RSPO and its president, in face of this good definition. Thus, we believe that it has to be responsibility with the planet, and I say it with the moral authority provided by having drafted a strict environmental policy, very strict in reference to the protection of the natural resources of the most bio-diverse by-square-kilometer country in the world. Here in Colombia we have devotion to the protection of our biodiversity, of our soils, of our waters, which has demanded a strengthening of the environmental authorities. The purpose of this protection is to position it but guaranteeing the viability of development, of progress and of the generation of employment.

Today the world focuses on a truly existential question; perhaps in the history of humanity we have not had a challenge greater than such put forth by global warming.

During times of biblical plagues, of nuclear threat, the entire human species has wondered about its future. Today, beyond any kind of speculation of a philosophical, theological or scientific nature, the truth is that mankind has to find a route to make development sustainable throughout the entire globe, reverse the pattern of the generation of gases that cause the greenhouse effect or we will not have a planet. If something important happened by the granting of the Nobel Peace Prize last year, it is that that acknowledgment to Mister Al Gore and to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climatic Change, IPCC, assessed and placed a final period on that exclusion.

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Of course the greenhouse effect gases may lead to planet Earth not being the planet that makes our lives possible due to its climatic conditions; thus mankind today thinks of environmental issues as priority issues for the species as a whole. It is not a group of environmental pioneers that fight for the green cause; it is no longer a simple group in society that has specific concerns: it is mankind as a whole that has to approach the environmental problems in a responsible manner, if we wish our future generations to have a planet to live on.

Due to this P of *Planet*, to this P of environmental sustainability it is the P that today crosses all sectors, all regions, all strata of global life, and we understand it on a constructive-dialogue basis in order to ensure in each activity, such as RSPO does, for this activity, such as Fedepalma has been doing in Colombia, that productive processes guarantee the protection of the planet, of the waters, of the natural forest, of endangered species, of the good condition of soils; the P of *People* is also fundamental to us and we celebrate and applaud the manner in which Fedepalma has incorporated the Interpretation of the National Principles of the RSPO.

Today environmental viability is also social viability. We have widely initiated an adjustment process in the approach to environmental licensing cycles, understanding today that where environmental licenses or permits are required we have to rise above the old environmental licensing as a construction permit, and transit toward the environmental as a great social agreement for the protection of the environment, thinking of communities, of the citizenry that inhabit the surroundings of the development of a project, thinking in the way that the RSPO principles do in regard to the rights of settled communities in the various zones, of the protection of ancestral rights, of current rights, recent rights or the longer duration of communities; thinking of constant dialogues in order for the benefit of the project to extend to the communities settled within the influence zone of the project.

Dear foreign visitors, we in Colombia feel very proud of the palm grower's sector. From here we have seen examples of social brotherhood, of social incorporation, of social and productive integration, of generous integration, of respect for the rights of communities.

Here, I see very important examples, I see Doctor Carlos Murgas, I see the effort that the Daabon group has made throughout all its certification process, and I could mention one by one, many of our Colombian countrymen that are here.

Here, we believe in this good and honest palm grower's sector because it is also socially responsible before its communities; and due to this, and I have to say it with the utmost respect, we feel that in that dimension of communication to which reference was made in the previous interventions, we have to state with clarity that a dark legend does not befit in the palm sector, that what there is, is a sector that generates brotherhood, solidarity, employment, wealth, and this is why the certification process is so valuable when it comes from the sector itself and so important for society when it is assumed as a collective endeavor.

It is absolutely inevitable in any activity, sector, guild, or productive life front that an evildoer might filter in, an irresponsible party someone not willing to comply with the high standards.

The importance of the RSPO, the importance of the certification process, is that it precisely vindicates the great majority that wants to do good, that does it well, that is willing, even to sacrifice part of its profits in order to ensure compliance with environmental and social standards. This is why the National Government, through me, today comes to reaffirm that it supports the RSPO efforts, Fedepalma and the certification task, in such a way that when these products are placed in the national or international markets, it be totally clear, as it is for us, before the good palm growers' sector, that behind it there is a process of responsibility, of brotherhood, of environmental protection, of environmental conservation. We believe in this certification.

When our vice minister, Claudia Mora, was with you at the Asian Summit, she carried a voice that entirely reflected the position of our government in this field, and we have to achieve the acceleration of this certification process, precisely because it vindicates the good efforts, the good struggles, the good investments and the good tasks, and let it be clear, once and for all, that this is a country that has been in no way, in this sector, and since we have this responsibility in government, tolerant with any form of criminality. Here, we fight so that honest businessmen, national and foreign,



have the right of way; where there are manifestations outside the law, we fight them, we attack them and we are defeating them.

This is why today I speak with conviction, with firmness, with clarity on what our Colombian palm growers' sector represents: large, small, and medium businessmen for whom we feel proud, for whom we feel truly excited in light of their permanent performance and to whom we have to come together with in support and protection, and with certification processes such as are being proposed and generated by the RSPO for the whole planet.

That is our course; that is the path that we all have to follow so that, as it must happen, this sector might count, worldwide, on these standards, the possibility of validating them and certifying them, and in Colombia it might open the doors for the very important generation of employment, for the very important integration of zones within our national territory that have been marginalized from development, because they have not found a strategic route to integrate to the progress that will surely allow us to build a better country.

The RSPO principles in transparency, in compliance with the law, in observance to better technologies, in all that has to do with environmental responsibility, with labor integration conditions, with access to land, cleanly, without deprivation, without any infringement process; in each of its fronts, could be subscribed to and signed as the orientating principles for all the governments own activities.

In this we believe, we feel interpreted, backed, finding an initiative with such vigor and such strength, and of course, Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, Jens Mesa, we feel enormously honored and grateful and stimulated that it is precisely on our Colombian soil where this First Latin-American Meeting takes place.

Be assured that our countrymen from the palm growers' sector find all the support from a government that values them, believes in them and joins them, and be assured our foreign visitors that from here we will be doing everything required to strengthen the spectrum and the impact of RSPO in Latin-America; That from here we are willing to offer all the cooperation and all the collaboration in order for you to advance in the fulfillment of all your objectives.

The only concern that remains after listening to the RSPO president is that his visit is too short, that it is not enough to have such few days in Colombia, because this is a wonderful country in which visitors may enjoy many days and many weeks falling in love with Colombia, as all Colombians that fight for our land each day are in love.

Let us hope, friends, that you will come, go back, and return to Colombia, and let us hope that we will continue, Doctor Jens, in Fedepalma and with all its associates, to work without truce in order for Fedepalma to be as it has to be: a source of wealth, of employment, of social brotherhood, of better living conditions for our countrymen.

I thank you all, for your attention.