



Speech of H.E. Nunzio Alfred D'Angieri

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“Think carefully before taking any decision!”

As the Delegate representing a country which is the world's Biodiversity Capital, on behalf of Belize I should like to share a few ideas about the fate of our planet in terms of the environment, and in particular to address the problem of future energy sources.

High-technology societies in the highly developed countries were familiar with the oil that seeped out of the surface deposits, and used it for non-commercial purposes, for caulking their wooden boats, waterproofing textiles, or fuelling torches. This is why it was originally known as "rock oil".

At the end of the 19th century – following the discovery in the United States of vast petroleum deposits in Pennsylvania, and the level of technological development thanks to the widespread use of the internal combustion engine – oil became the energy paradigm of the 20th century.

Energy is viewed as just another commodity.

This is not due to perverse thinking or a lack of sensitivity, but it is the outcome of the rationale of accumulation oriented towards the never-ending "commodification" of all the material and symbolic components of social life. This mercantile process has not been limited only to human beings, but has also extended to the world of nature. The earth and its products, rivers, mountains, forests and woodlands, have all been victims of unbridled plunder. Food, obviously, could not evade this infernal process. Capitalism turns everything within reach into tradeable commodities.

Food has been transformed into a source of energy, to facilitate the irrationality of a civilisation which, in order to sustain the wealth and privileges of the few, brutally assails the environment and the ecological conditions that made it possible for life to emerge on earth.

Transforming food into energy is a monstrous act.

Development is ready to practise the mass euthanasia of the poor, particularly those living in the South, because precisely there lie the planet's greatest biomass reserves which are needed to manufacture biofuels. Even though we are officially told that it is not a matter of choosing between food and fuel, the facts show us that this – and no other – is the only alternative we have: either use the land to produce food or to produce biofuels.

These are the main figures provided by FAO regarding arable land areas and fertiliser consumption:

- The developed countries have almost double the per capita arable land as the underdeveloped peripheral countries: 1.36 hectares per person in the North compared with 0.67 hectares in the South, for the simple reason that the underdeveloped periphery is host to about 80% of the world's population.
- In Brazil, the per capita arable land area is just slightly larger than that of the developed countries. It is obvious that Brazil will have to devote vast areas of its enormous landmass to meet the needs of the new energy paradigm.
- China and India have 0.44 and 0.18 hectares per inhabitant, respectively.
- The small Antilles states, which usually practise the monoculture of sugar cane, eloquently demonstrate the effects of its erosion, exemplified by the extraordinary high levels of fertilizer consumption per hectare in order to sustain production. While an average of 109 kg of fertiliser is used per hectare in the peripheral countries (compared with 84 kg in the industrialised capitalist countries), Barbados uses 187.5, Dominica 600, Guadalupe 1,016, Santa Lucia 1,325, and Martinique 1,609. But talk of fertilisers implies talk about intensive oil consumption, so that the much-heralded benefits of agro-energy for reducing hydrocarbons consumption appears more of an illusion than a reality.

Overall, the arable area of the European Union would barely be able to cover 70% of annual fuel requirements, but certainly not future needs which are likely to be even greater. In the United States, to meet the present demand for fossil fuels, 121% of the whole of United States' arable land would have to be set aside for agro-energy.

The supply of fuels of agricultural origin must therefore come from the South, from the poor, neocolonial, periphery. Mathematics is not an opinion, and neither the United States nor the European Union have the land required to be able to simultaneously increase food production and expand agrofuel production.

The deforestation of the planet could (albeit temporarily) expand the landmass suitable for cultivation purposes. But ultimately this would only work for a few decades because those lands would eventually turn into desert, and the situation would be worse than before, further exacerbating the dilemma of choosing between food production and ethanol or biological diesel production.

Combating hunger – and about 850 million people are suffering from hunger in the world with some 6 million children dying of starvation and malnutrition – will be seriously hampered by expanding arable land areas to produce agroenergy sources. The countries in which hunger is a universal scourge will witness the rapid reconversion of agriculture to meet the insatiable demand for energy products by a civilisation driven by their irrational use. The only outcome will be higher food prices, and hence a deterioration of the social situation in the countries of the South.

Moreover, the world's population is growing by 76 millions every year, and obviously all these are mouths that have to be fed, on food that is growing increasingly more expensive and unaffordable.

Lester Brown, in *The Globalist Perspective*, recently estimated that motor vehicles took up most of the world's increased cereals output in 2006. Of the 20 million tonnes of cereals produced in 2006, added to those produced in 2005, 14 million tonnes were used to produce biofuels, and only 6 millions to feed the hungry. He made it quite clear that the world's appetite for fuels for use in motor vehicles is insatiable. His conclusion is that we are heading towards a scenario in which a head-on collision is unavoidable between the 800 million rich motorcar owners and the consumers of food.

The devastating impact of increasing food prices which will inevitably occur as more land is used to produce food, or conversely to produce fuel, has been demonstrated by C. Ford Runge and Benjamin Senauer, two professors from Minnesota University, in an article published in the English language journal *Foreign Affairs*, under a title that speaks for itself: "How biofuels could kill the poor by apathy".

The authors argue that, in the United States, the expansion of the agrofuels industry has not only pushed up the prices of maize, oilseeds and other cereals, but also raised the prices of crops and products that have nothing to do with biofuels. Using arable land to grow maize to fuel the ethanol guzzlers is shrinking the acreages under other crops. Those engaged in processing food produced from crops such as peas or soft maize are being forced to pay higher prices to guarantee their supplies, the cost of which will eventually have to be passed on to consumers.

Increased food prices also damage the livestock and poultry industries. Higher costs have caused incomes to plummet, particularly from beef, poultry and pigmeat. Incomes – like production – are continuing to slump, while the prices of beef, chicken, turkey, pigmeat, milk, eggs and pasta are soaring. Let us not forget that even in countries like the USA and the UK, rice is now being rationed to shoppers, for the very first time since the second world war. The two scholars warn that the most devastating effects of increased food prices will be felt above all in the Third World countries.

A study conducted by the Belgian Office of Scientific Research has shown that biological diesel causes greater health and environmental problems because it generates more polluting particles and releases a greater number of the pollutants that are responsible for the destruction of the ozone layer.

As for the alleged "goodness" of biofuels, Victor Bronstein, a professor at Buenos Aires University, has shown that:

- It is not true that biofuels constitute a renewable and perennial energy source, because the crucial factor in crop growth is not sunshine but the availability of water and suitable soil conditions. Otherwise maize or sugarcane could be grown in the Sahara desert. Large-scale biological fuel production will have devastating effects.
- It is not true that biofuels are non-polluting. Although ethanol releases lower carbon emissions, the process of producing it pollutes the land and water with nitrates, herbicides, pesticides and waste, and releases aldehydes and cancer-causing alcohols into the atmosphere. The idea that there exists a "green and clean" fuel is a lie.
- The agrofuel proposal is morally and politically impracticable and unacceptable. But it is not enough simply to reject it. A new energy revolution is needed, to serve the people and not the monopolists in the hyper-developed countries.

This, perhaps, is the most important challenge today.

One of the priorities for Belize will be to support any solution which can make a tangible contribution to addressing the world food crisis, relaunch the campaign against hunger and poverty, and boost agricultural production in the developing countries.

A number of immediate steps are needed to address the problem of hunger and malnutrition, the hike in food prices, the increasing scarcity of land and water, the production of biofuels, and population growth.

Considering the serious mismatch between the world food supply and demand, any measures must focus on providing access to food by the people living in the developing countries.

This conference offers a great opportunity to establish close cooperation between the developed countries, which must adopt urgent measures to step up agricultural production and safeguard the people in the countries which are the most seriously affected by the negative repercussions of price increases.

The main goal must be to guarantee the right to food and the value of human dignity, to ensure not only the distribution of food subsidies and cash transfers alone, but also investments targeted to guarantee emergency assistance to the poorest nations while at the same time reviving agriculture and strengthening the capacities of the rural communities to develop and promote local farming and micro-farmers. This being so, we trust that not only will cash-in-aid be forthcoming, but above all high technology transfers from the developed countries, to be able to create the infrastructure that is missing and the necessary technologies, so that poor farmers living in marginal lands will have easier access to land and water. Poor smallholders should be given greater access to production inputs, above all land and water.

From this point of view it is important to coordinate investments. Production and trade policies relating to biofuels should also be reviewed in the light of their effects on the international food markets, and hence on food security, particularly in the most vulnerable countries.

The first response should be to raise world food production. Every country should allocate funds to create a favourable environment that is able to attract private investment, while at the same time ensuring that the poorest people are protected against hunger, by adopting the policies, strategies and programmes necessary to overcome the challenges that lie in the way of establishing world futurity.

This situation should lead us to ask a number of questions.

As you can see, this short summary has taken up space. More is needed and more time. Practically a book. When shall we succeed in stopping industries and societies that, purely for profit, are producing poisons and removing raw materials from the earth, breaking up and killing coral reefs solely for material interests, or out of ignorance or indifference, or all three together, and start disseminating the sound, wholesome and honest proposals of those who are fighting for life and the survival of the species?

When shall we begin talking seriously about creating alternative energies without poisoning the people living in large cities with pollution?

When shall we stop devastating forests in whole regions, such as Amazonia? When shall we begin using wind energy or solar energy or processing our waste to create clean energy? When shall we bring electric cars into circulation in our cities and build more railways to reduce road traffic?

We must give an answer.

Let us start using lower energy-consumption light bulbs, denying access by polluting cars to the town centres in our large cities, and get more people to use public transport fuelled by methane or clean energy!

We must start discussing this, and condemn those who refuse to sign international treaties intended to create a cleaner world.

As you see the synthesis has occupied its space. It would want more space and more time to us. In practical a book.

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