

World Food Day Event / Symposium on the International Year of the Potato
～ Think about Food through Potato ～

November 09, 2008 – Yokohama, Japan

Speech by Ambassador of the Republic of Peru, H.E. Hugo Palma

I deeply thank all that made possible this space for discussing the role of potatoes in today's acute world food crisis and to highlight their importance for food security.

An ancient gift from Peru to the world, they grew first as wild poisonous tubers around the highland Lake Titicaca and were domesticated over centuries by the Andean people. In the 16th century, Spanish conquerors "exported" them to Europe, slowly becoming a worldwide used staple. Nowadays, potatoes are the third most important food crop, being consumed by nearly a billion people in 130 countries.

Lima, capital of Peru, is the headquarters of the International Center of the Potato (CIP). This international organization keeps the germoplasm of every known species of Andean tubers. These are most valuable tools for the world's food security.

The first of the Millennium Development Goals proclaimed by the UN is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the World Food Program (WFP) reports that progress has been made in a number of developing countries and in this respect, it is worth noting that potatoes presence and use are growing. For instance, China became in 2007 the world's biggest potato producer, India intends to double its potato production in the next five to ten years and Bangladesh has made a matter of policy the sharp increase in the planting and consumption of potatoes.

In the actual context of world food crisis and with the world population expected to grow more than a hundred million people a year in the coming twenty years, mainly in developing countries, potatoes are becoming even more important. It is no accident that countries are taking a new look at potatoes because, among other reasons, while increases in the cost of wheat, rice and corn have been very sharp, the price of potatoes has remained stable. Moreover, potatoes possess an extraordinary nutritional value and produce more food, faster and on less land than any other major crop. Being suitable for almost any geographical and climatic conditions, they are grown and eaten locally, with little significant international trade compared to cereals, making them particularly valuable as a source of food and work in developing countries.

Although Peru is the cradle of potatoes, it is not very relevant in the commercial plane. For five centuries, these gifts from Peru to the world have literally saved entire populations in times of famine and wars. In the present conditions of inhuman suffering due to the food crisis, they continue to be a priority tool for alleviating the worldwide food emergency. We welcome, once again, the whole of mankind to benefit from the treasure we have inherited and kept for all and this is why we are happy and proud to participate in the holding of this event.