Statement

First Ministerial Conference on Low Emission Food Systems: addressing the challenge of reducing methane in Agriculture

14 April 2023

Background:

Global agriculture and food systems are experiencing an unprecedented crisis that affects food security and nutrition and the livelihoods of millions of farmers. Moreover, the negative effects of climate change and increasing number of trade barriers on agriculture and food systems are evident, especially in the most vulnerable countries, agriculture being one of the sectors most affected by extreme weather events.

Sustainable agriculture is critical for development and food security in a planet where 10% of the global population face hunger.

The agricultural sector is highly vulnerable to climate change, which impacts livelihoods and natural resources and contributes to increases in poverty, hunger and global food prices – yet the sector is also an important part of the solution for adapting to and mitigating climate change.

The window of time to address these challenges of climate change is closing. It is necessary to accelerate a transition towards more sustainable low-emission and resilient agriculture respecting national priorities and necessities, but without affecting food security.

Within the sector's emissions, methane constitutes one of the main greenhouse gases, coming mainly from the enteric fermentation of cattle, animal manure management systems, and paddy rice cultivation. Although methane from agriculture is part of a cyclical system that also sequesters carbon and should be considered in that context, in terms of GHG accounting, the IPCC estimates that methane from agriculture accounts for about 40% of emissions of this gas.

As part of the international efforts to address methane mitigation in all sectors, in November 2021 during COP26 in Glasgow, the Global Methane Pledge (GMP) initiative was launched, inviting countries to take voluntary actions to contribute to the collective goal of reducing global methane emissions by at least 30% by 2030, compared to 2020 levels. The initiative is currently

supported by 150 countries, representing more than 50% of global methane emissions and over two-thirds of global GDP.

Under the umbrella of this initiative, the GMP Food and Agriculture Pathway and the GMP Waste Pathway were launched in November 2022 during COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. These platforms aim to address food security challenges in the climate context through new technical and innovative actions that sustainably increase productivity, reduce food loss and waste, improve the sustainability of agriculture and food systems, and reduce methane emissions.

To advance the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, it is necessary to accelerate actions to identify and implement solutions that promote food security and food loss and waste reduction in an increasingly challenging context, and at the same time, move towards sustainable agriculture and enhance the role of agriculture in its contribution to climate change mitigation.

This statement, in the context of the various actions related to work to contribute to food security and low emissions, will not imply the adoption of unilateral trade restrictive measures, consistent with World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules.

Considering that agriculture and related activities within food systems (land use change, pre- and post-production processes) are responsible for one third of global GHG emissions and at the same time are fundamental for world food security, we encourage other economic sectors to take action to reduce emissions.

Recognizing the need for action to address these shared challenges, the importance of international collaboration and of involving all actors in agriculture, to position the sector as a key contributor in the fight against the climate crisis, participating countries communicate our shared vision based on the following principles:

1. Promote interventions that sustainably increase agricultural productivity, farmers' income and food security, while reducing food loss and waste, and emissions.

2. Emphasize the urgency of scaling up action and support, including access to finance, capacity building and technology development and transfer, to enhance sustainability, adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change of farmers.

3. Support the ability of farmers, particularly smallholders to create sustainable livelihoods and farm businesses, ensuring that interventions in production systems are not trade distorting and enhance adaptive capacity and resilience for food security and reduce their vulnerability to climate risks.

4. Promote ambitious policies, agricultural practices, and sustainable food systems, taking into account local and national circumstances, to conserve soil carbon, increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

5. Promote incentive mechanisms to support those countries who advance to achieve their commitments assumed in international environmental forums, while avoiding additional barriers to agricultural trade.

6. Promote research, development, innovation, access to finance, implementation of, and capacity for continuous improvements in, emissions measurement and monitoring, and deploy technologies aimed at increasing resilience and productivity and reducing methane emissions and other greenhouse gases in agriculture, in line with sustainable approaches for food loss and waste.

7. Promote the development and implementation of Best Available Techniques (BATs), and best agricultural practices proven and validated internationally, for the reduction of methane emissions and other gases on agricultural systems.

8. Strengthen monitoring, reporting, and verification mechanisms to better reflect mitigation efforts undertaken by countries in their GHG accounting systems, and Biennial Transparency Reports.

In this context, we the ministers of agriculture and heads of delegation from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Germany, Panama, Peru, Spain, United States and Uruguay, COMMIT TO:

1. Facilitate and promote the enabling conditions for the deployment of science-based practices, innovation, and technologies in line with sustainable food production and agriculture through the design and implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation policies.

2. Pursue efforts to mitigate climate change in agriculture and food systems, in accordance with the Paris Agreement, without affecting food security.

3. Work to embed agriculture and food into national climate processes, including increasing ambition in accordance with national priorities and necessities, building on existing commitments and updating Nationally Determined Contributions of the Paris Agreement. Strengthen commitment to accountability based on the Biennial Transparency Report (BTR), provided that robust and internationally recognized methods for emission reduction, measurement and accounting are available.

4. Consider developing national adaptation and mitigation plans for the agricultural sector, and strengthen existing ones, taking advantage of successful experiences, and existing evidence, recognizing the three dimensions of sustainability and the role of innovation hubs in the sector.

5. Foster climate actions in the livestock sector, through innovative interventions and policies that encourage the implementation of practices compatible with emissions efficient livestock systems, while recognizing and promoting the contribution of livestock to food security, nutrition, biodiversity, the livelihoods of farmers and the maintenance and improvement of soil health.

6. Evaluate the current state of public policies and investments in the sector and, where appropriate, redirect efforts to enhance innovation and support more sustainable agriculture, considering elements of circular economy, just transition, and inclusive decision-making.

7. Support initiatives aimed at reducing methane emissions and emissions intensity in agriculture and food systems according to their national goals, including public-private collaboration, crowding in private investment, actively promoting innovative solutions adapted locally, and promoting the exchange of international experience and knowledge, in particular through the development and implementation of BATs for emission reduction.

8. Avoiding duplication of effort and working to strengthen existing arrangements and processes, support efforts to improve the quality and quantity of, and access to, finance for climate change adaptation and mitigation in agriculture and food.

9. Work from multilateral spaces, and within the framework of the UNFCCC, to effectively materialize the access of developing regions to agile sources of financing in accordance with their needs to implement their climate commitments. Methane reduction actions could be enhanced by effective access to finance tools.

10. Continue collaborating globally and in other international forums to address the main challenges posed by the climate crisis in the sector, respecting national priorities and commitments, which are, together with international free trade, essential to ensuring food security.