

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE OF PERU
MR ISMAEL BENAVIDES, DURING THE LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF
THE "INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE POTATO"
IN THE UNITED NATIONS
New York, 18th October 2007**

Mr President of the General Assembly,
Mr Vice-president of the Economic and Social Council,
Mr General- Director of FAO,
Mr President of the Board of Directors of the International Potato Centre,

I am pleased to represent the President of Peru on the occasion of launching the "International Year of the Potato", an initiative that my country formulated two years ago within the framework of the FAO Biennial Conference and was later endorsed by the United Nations. And I am particularly pleased that this launching coincides with the "World Food Day".

Potato is the most important food crop in Peru, a bio-cultural resource of world significance and one of the four main crops of the world together with maize, wheat and rice.

Potato is more than 8 thousand years old and its domestication was the work of the ancient residents of the Peruvian Andes. From Peru, it was taken to Europe by the Spaniards, later becoming a staple that saved Europeans from widespread famines. With time it became an essential part of their diet and culture. It later extended to other continents of our planet.

The Andean inhabitant assured his subsistence making use of this natural resource and transforming it into food and storing it for lengthy periods, which allowed his survival under the harshest Andean conditions, where potato's biggest genetic diversity is developed until today, cultivated, as well as wild. In Peru, we can find more than 1 thousand varieties produced in different parts of our country.

Peru is the first potato producing country in Latin America: In 2006, it produced 3.3 million tons and our annual consumption is around 65 kilos per person. It is the main crop and staple food of more than 600 thousand families of the Andean region.

Potato production is still fundamentally grown by Andean farmers that own small plots of land, at an altitude between 2,500 and 4 thousand meters above sea level, while a more reduced area in the coastal valleys is dedicated to commercial production.

Potato growing represents a communal working chain: from sowing season till harvest, from the selection of seeds to its storage and processing. The story of potato is the history of our Andean peoples where the deep inter-Andean

valleys as well as Andean terraces testify the high level of agricultural and hydraulic development reached by our pre Inca and Inca cultures. It is a crop that not only possesses multiple uses as human nourishment, but as a traditional medicine and as part of the farmers' social life; briefly, it is an inherent part of our millennial culture and Peruvians feel proud of their substantial contribution to feeding the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am convinced that the International Year of the Potato will be a unique opportunity to promote the potato's biological, nutritional and culinary attributes, and to join forces throughout the world to deepen research on its diversity and to improve productivity through technology and to increase trade and widespread consumption for the benefit of the millions of both producers and consumers in the world.

Potato is nowadays a basic staple in the global population's diet and its importance becomes more evident in moments when world food demand grows in a way never seen before. It is an economic product, abundant the whole year round. It is time to generate a worldwide awareness to protect, promote and continue to improve potato production and to strengthen our belief that this ancient product has contributed and will continue to do so in helping the world to combat hunger and malnutrition, and to be a source of healthy and nutritious food for coming generations.
