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SPEECH BY THE DELEGATE OF EL SALVADOR
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Mr. Chairman, Delegates:

The main agricultural problems of El Salvador may be summarized under four headings:

1. - Overpopulation
2. - Gradual impoverishment of the soil by ceaseless cultivation and the non use of fertilizers;
3. - The low technical level of methods for the production and harvesting of basic foodstuffs; and
4. - The limited purchasing power of the agricultural population, owing to the above-mentioned problems and to the low selling price of Salvadorian basic food products.

At the present time about 40 per cent of the total surface of El Salvador is cultivated. This means that the area under cultivation is equivalent to about one-third of a hectare per head of the population. When the process of agricultural development in the country is completed about 50 per cent of the total area will be under cultivation. Assuming that the population remains static, that will mean an average of 0.55 hectare of cultivated land per head. But we know that our population has increased by over 25 per cent in the last ten years.

The limits of Salvadorian agriculture are thus very restricted. That has been the reason for the unrestrained

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exploitation of our soil which, combined with the non-use of fertilizers, has led to a squandering of the original wealth and raised serious problems of erosion, deforestation and impoverishment of the drinking water sources.

In addition, the low technical level of the methods of cultivation of basic crops in El Salvador (maize, beans, rice) and the limited use of modern means of production aggravate our problem. There are a series of factors which restrict the use of agricultural machinery, fertilizers, fungicides, insecticides, etc., in basic food production in our country. The annual income of the farmer or middleman engaged in the production of maize, beans or rice is extremely small, owing, chiefly, to the low rate of return on the crops per unit of land and the smallness of many of the plots. The standard of rural education is low and there are no well organized agricultural training services. There is a shortage of experts and skilled labour for operating and maintaining modern machines and equipment and nothing is known about the need for fertilizers for each different type of soil or, in many cases, about agricultural pests and the best means of combating them. Moreover, the cost of unskilled labour is low whilst the cost of fuel and machine maintenance is very high.

The Government of El Salvador has been giving its attention to these problems for some years and is endeavouring to improve technical standards in agriculture. There are four commodities in which a relatively high level of efficiency and productivity has been reached in my country; they are - coffee, sugar cane and, more recently,

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cotton and sesame. The cumulative effect of wartime shortages, the high prices obtained per exported agricultural products during the last five years and the increasing rate of progress in cultivation techniques due to the Government's programmes for extending the use of agricultural machinery, fertilizers and pesticides, have resulted in the fact that in 1947 El Salvador used four times the number of tractors and agricultural implements, eight times the amount of fertilizers and three times the amount of insecticides than before the war.

As regards agricultural mechanization the Government of El Salvador has established a central service, within the Directorate General of Agriculture, to provide machinery and skilled labour for farmers on a non-profit basis. The service was set up at the beginning of 1948 and is exclusively concerned with the preparation of land for maize cultivation by small farmers. It possesses at present 12 fully equipped tractors. In addition the Ministry of Agriculture is also carrying out a programme by which fertilizers are sold at cost price to small farmers on an easy payment system. Further, the Government took an active part in the campaign against the locust plague which ravaged our crops from 1927 to 1948, importing large quantities of modern equipment and new organic insecticides, such as cloridane and hexachloro-benzine, which were used extensively without charge to the farmers. All these efforts on the part of the Government were designed to increase the production of basic foodstuffs.

The delegation of El Salvador has read with great

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interest Chapter IV of the Economic Survey of Latin America and the document submitted by the ECIA-IAO Joint Working Group. The latter makes various suggestions for a more thorough study of the problems of agricultural economy in our countries and for determined efforts to solve them both national and internationally. El Salvador has comments and suggestions to make, at the appropriate time, on each of the suggestions of the Joint Working Group, but wishes to place on record at this juncture its approval in general of the work done by the Secretariat.

Thank you.