

## Brazil rejects biofuels criticism

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The Brazilian president has rejected criticism that his country's production of biofuels has forced a surge in global food prices and harms the environment.

Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva accused critics of being driven by economic and political interests, and failing to highlight soaring oil prices and increased demand as a factor in pushing up food production costs.

"Don't tell me, for the love of God, that food is expensive because of biodiesel," he told reporters.

"Food is expensive because the world wasn't prepared to see millions of Chinese, Indians, Africans, Brazilians and Latin Americans eat. We want to discuss this not with passion but rationality and not from the European point of view."

Lula made his comments following a week of protests in Brazil and Europe against the fuels made from food crops and their supposed environmental and social consequences.

This week, the EU's environmental chief, Stavros Dimas, said that biofuels, which Brazil hopes to export to the EU, must now meet social and environmental conditions, and that "the issue of sustainability criteria is of crucial importance."

Scientists from the European Environment Agency urged the 27-nation bloc to drop its 10% biofuel target for road transport fuels.

Lula rebuffed accusations by Jean Ziegler, the UN's special rapporteur for the right to food, that biofuels were a "crime against humanity".

"The real crime against humanity is to discredit biofuels a priori and condemn food-starved and energy-starved countries to dependence and insecurity," Lula said.

Some of Brazil's neighbours, led by oil-rich Venezuela, warned this week that biofuels could increase malnutrition in Latin America.

Lula said he was "shocked" that biofuel critics failed to mention the impact that high oil prices had on food production costs.

"It's always easier to hide economic and political interests behind supposed social and environmental interests," he said.

The growing criticism has placed Brazil at the centre of the global biofuels debate. The country has enjoyed an agricultural export boom, and has become the world's largest exporter of ethanol, which is derived from sugar cane.

Critics say the increased production of crops for ethanol and biodiesel, which is derived from oil seeds, competes for land with food crops, and is pushing cattle ranchers and farmers further north in Brazil, contributing to the destruction of the Amazon rainforest.

But the Brazilian government has argued that it has plenty of unused land to plant crops for biofuels and that current production was still too small to affect food prices.

