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Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
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Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة
الأغذية والزراعة
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CONFERENCE

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Statement of the Director-General

I would like to start by welcoming and thanking all of you for the great turnout at this Conference. I am most grateful for the commitment you all demonstrate by being here today.

During the week, we will have the presence of 1 President, 1 Prime Minister, 1 Deputy Prime Minister, 82 Ministers registered at the moment, 16 Vice-Ministers, 176 Member delegations, and the total of 1.109 (one thousand one hundred and nine) participants registered, including many international organizations, the Private Sector, and Civil Society Representatives.

This is a clear reflection of the importance of food and agriculture for Sustainable Development, as we have just heard from Prime Minister Gentiloni, and also from the Cardinal Pietro Parolin. We have to fully explore all the contributions that sustainable agriculture and food systems can give towards implementing the 2030 Agenda.

This is why we have prepared 19 side events throughout the week. At least 6 of them are linked to climate change, which is the theme of this Conference. Climate change is today one of the main challenges we are facing. We will have opportunities to discuss the relationships between climate change and food security, nutrition, water scarcity and migration, among other issues.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish I could announce here today some good news regarding the global fight against hunger, as I did in the last Conference in 2015. But, unfortunately, it is not the case. Preliminary data available indicate for this year that the number of undernourished people in the world has increased, rising again. The final number will be released in September, with the launch of the State of Food Security and Nutrition, SOFI 2017. But, unfortunately, that is not good news.

I am sure that you are not completely surprised. Earlier this year famine was declared in parts of South Sudan. And by the time famine is declared, it means that thousands of people have already died from hunger. Alerts of high risk of famine were also issued for Northeast Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen. Nearly 20 million people are heavily affected in these four countries.

And this is happening less than two years after we agreed to eradicate hunger by 2030. Strong political commitment to eradicate hunger is fundamental. But it is not enough. Hunger will only be defeated if countries translate their pledges into concrete action, especially at national and local levels. It is there where the people are in need.

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Today, conflicts and the impacts of climate change pose increasing challenges to our global efforts to eradicate hunger and extreme poverty. FAO currently identifies 19 countries in a protracted crisis situation. All of these 19 countries are engaged in internal conflict and violence, often combined with adverse climatic events.

Almost 60% of the people suffering from hunger in the world live in areas affected by conflicts and by the impact of climate change. They are predominantly rural people. Their livelihoods have been disrupted. Many of them have found NO option other than increasing the statistics of distress migration. In fact, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons has doubled from 2007 to 2015 to nearly 60 million people.

Peace is of course the key to ending these crises. But we cannot wait for peace to take action. There is much we can do to fight hunger during conflicts and protracted crises.

FAO, WFP, IFAD and partners are working hard to assist these vulnerable people. We combine humanitarian assistance with development actions to protect and restore their agriculture-based livelihoods. It is extremely important to ensure that these people have the conditions to continue producing their own food where they live. To save lives, we have to save their livelihoods. We cannot save people and put them in camps.

It is a great pleasure to have with me on podium today Mr. Gilbert Hounbo, President of IFAD, and Mr. David Beasley, Executive-Director of WFP

At lunch time today, during the Zero Hunger side event, we will elaborate better our ideas to advance in the fight against hunger. On Thursday, FAO is also organizing a special event on conflict and famine. We will present concrete actions, and also share the results that have been achieved so far.

Excellencies;

This Conference marks another important step in the FAO transformation process. The Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) for the next biennium, as well as the Medium Term Plan 2018-2021, have been designed to align FAO's work with the Sustainable Development Goals. In other words, our five Strategic Objectives will have the same targets as many of the SDGs. FAO's work is projected to contribute to the achievement of 40 targets of 15 SDGs.

This alignment has been possible because of the centrality of food and agriculture to the sustainable development agenda 2030. And also because, over the last five years, FAO has adopted an integrated, interlinked and interconnected approach, similar to the SDGs.

In the next biennium, FAO intends to increase its technical capacity in the 10 priority areas. This includes climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable agriculture production, poverty reduction, water scarcity, migration and the support of conflict-affected rural livelihoods. We will continue our work on nutrition, fisheries, forestry and the one-health agenda, including Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). And we are bringing the Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) to 14 percent of the core budget, as requested by the last Conference.

Let me also observe that the SDGs will greatly impact on the volume of our work in statistics. Just to compare, FAO was responsible for only 4 indicators under the framework of Millennium Development Goals, the MDGs. In relation to the SDGs, FAO is custodian or co-custodian of 25 indicators. This is six times more.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Programme Implementation Report 2014-2015 presents the results achieved by the Organization during the past biennium. I am glad to announce that almost 90 percent of the output targets were fully achieved, with two thirds of these exceeded. This helped Members to accomplish nearly 80 percent of

the expected outcomes. So FAO is delivering, and this is producing an important and measurable impact at the global, regional and especially national level.

This is also a result of the decentralization programme that we have put forward. And it is a great satisfaction to see that Member Countries are officially recognizing that today FAO is much more efficient and effective. National reports from many developed and developing countries now list FAO as an Organization that gives value-for-money.

This performance is also a result of an internal restructuring effort, while sharpening the focus of the Organization. And more important, we have been able to rearrange the Organization without affecting our overall technical capacity. This is the conclusion of the Independent Assessment of our Technical Capacity, presented earlier this year. The report indicates that, in quantitative terms, FAO has increased its technical capacity in the period from 2012 to 2016, both at Headquarters and in Decentralized Offices. We are missing a qualitative approach and this will be undertaken internally at the next possible opportunity.

Excellencies,

Since 2012 when I took office, we have been operating under the same nominal regular budget. This means a real budget decrease in the last 3 biennia. Despite that, we have found USD 116 million dollars over the last five years in savings, due to efficiency gains, the re-profiling of administrative jobs and also the use of consultants.

But we have cut to the bone. We cannot continue on this path for the future. For the next biennium, we are also de-emphasizing some specific activities to be able to invest in priority areas. We know the reality. We know that countries are facing difficult financial constraints. This is why I have proposed to maintain once more the nominal regular budget for the next biennium. FAO Council has endorsed this proposal, and recommended this Conference to approve it.

In this context, I ask you to remember that voluntary contributions are increasingly vital to FAO. We have elaborated an Information Note that explains the priorities, and also indicates the areas and activities in which we are expecting to allocate voluntary contributions. And let me renew my appeal to countries to invest their money in FAO. OECD countries, for example, will pay almost 70 million dollars less assessed contributions in the next biennium, due to the new scale that will be approved in this Conference. I urge all countries to keep here at FAO their financial resources that will exceed the total of their new assessment contributions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by saying that despite the recent setbacks in the fight against hunger, I am still very confident that we can become the Zero Hunger Generation.

We have the global commitment, and we have the tools and knowledge to achieve it. And this is a fight of everyone not just for FAO, WFP and IFAD. We need everyone on board. The SDGs are universal. And it could not be different. Today, what happens in the rural areas of Africa, Asia or Latin America has impacts in many other parts of the world. Migration shows that.

There is no peace without sustainable development, and there is no sustainable development without peace. Vulnerable people, rural people cannot be left behind, especially youth and women. We have to build conditions for them to thrive, for them to have hope. For them to exercise their human right to food.

Ending hunger is the core of FAO mandate. Promoting sustainable agriculture development also. And we will remain firmly true to our mandate, in order to contribute to a better, fairer and safer world for everyone.

Thank you very much for your attention.