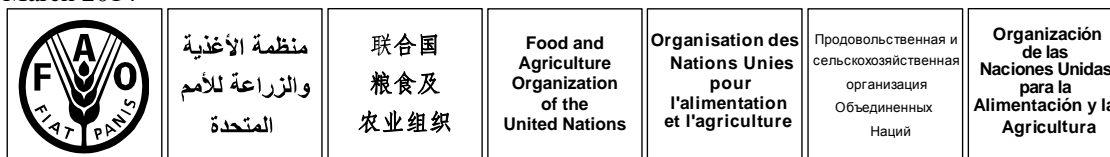


March 2014



FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific

Thirty-second Session

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 10–14 March 2014

Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Director-General,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished Delegates, it is a privilege for me to participate in this 32nd Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific, and to speak to you on some of the major issues that impact on the work of our Organization at the start of the 2014-2015 biennium.

At the outset I would like to express my sincere appreciation to you, Mr Chairman, and through you to your Government and the people of Mongolia for the excellent hospitality extended to all of us in this magnificent city of Ulaanbaatar.

As this is the first time I address this Regional Conference since being elected as the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council by the FAO Conference in June last year, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my gratitude for that mark of confidence.

I have taken up this position with enthusiasm, and I am committed to steering the Council towards more effective deliberations, engaging with Members and Management on the key issues, in order to find the common ground and move together in a spirit of reciprocal trust - as already exemplified by the recent launch of the preparatory process for the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), and the Independent Review of Governance Reform and other issues which have called for coordinated and cooperative action by Members and Management.

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Members' interest, sense of ownership and engagement in the work of FAO is greater than ever as the Organization tackles the increasingly complex and persistent challenges of extreme poverty, food insecurity, hunger, malnutrition and environmental threats against a background of resource limitations.

In my first six months of office I have had many opportunities to witness such renewed commitment by the Members, not least during the reformulation of the Organization's Strategic Objectives, and also by the staff, as was clear in their expression of dedication and commitment to the goals of the Organization in their Representative's message to the last session of Council.

The renewed Strategic Framework and Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) for 2014-2015 also reflect the regional priorities formulated by you at the Regional Conference held two years ago, such as the Programmatic Regional Initiative (Strategic Objective 2) "Rice-based production systems in Asia".

The implementation of the PWB for 2014-2015 began last month, after the December 2013 session of Council had endorsed adjustments to the PWB, in accordance with the decision and guidance of the 38th Session of the FAO Conference in June 2013.

Implementation will require dedicated and concerted efforts both by FAO staff, at all levels, and the Members. At the same time, planning has to start this year for the programmes for the 2016-17 biennium. Hence the need for inputs and guidance from Technical Committees and Regional Conferences, in keeping with their role as FAO Governing Bodies.

That said, I should also mention how encouraged I am to see progress not only in the way Regional Conference guidance is reported back to the Council and Conference; but also how such decisions are made and then followed up on. This is still work in progress, but I believe we are on track as I have seen that the way regional perspectives are taken into consideration continues to be fine-tuned.

Of course, much depends on the focus and clarity of the guidance contained in the Report you will be submitting both to the June 2015 session of Conference on policy and regulatory matters, and to the June 2014 session of Council on programme and budgetary matters.

The Report of the Asia Pacific Regional Conference will inform the FAO Conference and Council on the outcome of your discussions, which over the course of this week will focus on the opportunities and challenges in the region and priority areas of work to improve food security and nutrition, increase agricultural productivity, raise the standard of living in rural populations and contribute to sustainable economic growth.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, the *Report of the Independent External Evaluation of FAO in 2007* highlighted governance as central to a strengthened FAO, if the Organization is to meet the expectations of its Members. As you know, the follow-up *Immediate Plan of Action for FAO Renewal*, driven by the Members, was subsequently successfully implemented from 2010 to 2013. The completed reform actions have since been integrated in the work of FAO.

You may also recall that the *Immediate Plan of Action* envisaged a comprehensive review of progress on governance reforms and their effectiveness after a six year period. So, in December 2013 the Council endorsed arrangements for an Independent Review of Governance Reform, as well as the appointment of Ms Maxine Olson and Ms Nadia Hijab to the review team for this exercise.

The review team is interacting with Members at selected Governing Body sessions to seek views on progress made so far, what remains to be done, and what could be done differently to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of FAO's Governing Bodies. The outcome of its review will serve as input to the discussion and assessment of governance reforms by the Conference in 2015.

Ms Tullia Aiuzzi, Senior Evaluation Officer (OED), is present at this Regional Conference and has been interfacing with as many of you as possible this week to seek your views on progress made so far in the implementation of Governance Reform.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, as I am sure you know (as already mentioned by the FAO Director-General in his speech), this year FAO, together with the World Health Organization (WHO), will convene the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) from 19 to 21 November at FAO headquarters.

The preparations for this important event are progressing well. Your interest, engagement and support during the preparations as well as your presence and active participation at Conference will help mobilize the levels of international cooperation needed for more effective action to end malnutrition.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, your Region has continued to demonstrate the importance of agriculture and food security with a renewed emphasis and commitment. I warmly congratulate you on the various initiatives you have so far taken.

Indeed, in concluding, let me reiterate that it is exactly this renewed emphasis and commitment on agriculture and food security that makes it the duty of this Regional Conference to indicate clear and concrete priorities for the Asia Pacific Region.

I firmly believe that the continuing engagement and commitment of the governments in this Region will do much to ensure that FAO continues to serve you well, and to be an effective agent in the struggle to free the world of hunger and malnutrition.

Thank you.