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منظمة الأغذية
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联合国
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Food and
Agriculture
Organization
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pour
l'alimentation
et l'agriculture

Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная
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Объединенных
Наций

Organización
de las
Naciones Unidas
para la
Alimentación y la
Agricultura

FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific

Thirty-second Session

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 10-14 March 2014

Statement of the Director-General

Mr Chairperson of the Conference,

Heads of Delegations

Your Excellency Norov Altankhuyag, Prime Minister of Mongolia,

*Mr Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, Wilfred Ngirwa,
Chairperson of the Regional Conference,*

Heads of Delegation,

Distinguished Delegates, Ministers,

Civil society representatives,

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of FAO and of all the participants of the Thirty-Second FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific, allow me to express our profound gratitude to the Government and the people of Mongolia for their hospitality and warm welcome.

Two years ago, in Hanoi, this Regional Conference played a critical role in shaping FAO's priorities and making it a fitter organization to overcome the challenges of the 21st Century.

Today, I will report back to you on the work that has been done over the last 24 months and present our next steps.

Last year brought some good news on the food security front in the midst of a still difficult international situation.

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communications.*

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The first Millennium Development Goal hunger target of reducing by half the proportion of undernourishment in the population is still within reach at the global scale.

As of today, some 60 developing countries have already reached the first Millennium Development Goal hunger target or have brought undernourishment levels to below 5 percent of their total population.

In Asia these countries include Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Fiji, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

As a whole, Asia-Pacific appears to be on track to achieve the MDG hunger target. Indeed, in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Southeastern Asia have already reached it. Progress in Southern Asia and the Pacific Island Countries has been slower.

Having said that, I wish to emphasize the importance of not only reducing hunger but completely eradicating it. This is the Zero Hunger Challenge launched by Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon which has been taken up by the Governments of this Region and is the theme of a side-event at this Regional Conference.

I want to say that food security is at the core of the future we want. The Rio+20 Conference clearly stated that development cannot be called sustainable if millions are left behind suffering from hunger and extreme poverty.

I would like also to call your attention to the fact that our challenge is to end all forms of malnutrition. Worldwide, about two billion people suffer from micronutrient and vitamin deficiencies, and obesity, which are related to unhealthy eating habits.

In Asia, excluding Japan, over 30 percent of the children have vitamin A deficiency and nearly half suffer from anemia. And in the Pacific Islands, excluding Australia and New Zealand, over 20 percent of the adult population are considered obese.

In this regard, I would like to take the opportunity to invite you and Heads of State and Government to take part in the Second International Conference on Nutrition, which FAO and the World Health Organization are co-hosting next November in Rome.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the past two years, FAO underwent a significant transformational change to better assist our Members in responding to the challenges you face. I would like to now share a few examples.

First, we have mapped a new route. We revisited FAO's strategic framework and strategic objectives. Through a consultative and bottom-up approach, the Regional Conferences helped define and sharpen the focus of our work.

We now have five strategic objectives. And, for the first time, we have a truly results-based Program of Work and Budget.

Second, we are much more proactive in building meaning partnerships to help reach the goals established by our Members. For the first time, FAO has clear strategies for partnerships with the private sector and civil society approved by Council.

We are also much more open and committed to working with other UN agencies and international and regional organizations.

Third, we have put in place a new protocol to respond quickly and efficiently to emergencies. This protocol is being used in the responses to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. This has quickened our reaction time and improved the support we can give. I just came back from a visit to see the response in the Philippines and I can assure you the efficacy of this protocol.

Related to this, resilience building is now firmly embedded in our emergency efforts.

I could list more accomplishments, but I will stop here.

I do want to point out that everything we are doing is made possible by the rebuilt trust among Members and Management. This is not something that we take for granted, and we work every day for you to keep on trusting us.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like now to take a few minutes to show what the FAO renewal means for the Asia and Pacific Region.

I would like to summarize it like this: we are now better prepared to respond to your needs and demands.

We are strengthening our Regional and Subregional Offices, establishing professional posts to address needs identified by the last Regional Conference.

At FAO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific we have established three new positions of Senior Rice Expert, Land Tenure, Partnerships and South-South Cooperation Officers.

In the Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands, we have established a new P-4 Fisheries Officer position and upgraded our Food and Nutrition Officer and Forest Resources Management Officer to P4 positions.

International staff positions in three countries and four national officer positions in the Pacific Sub-Region have also been created.

I also want to highlight that the integration of emergency and development activities at the country level under the leadership of the FAO Representative has been completed in all countries of the Region.

I want to highlight the importance of this integration and of bridging emergency response to development through resilience building. The Asia and Pacific Region is one of the most vulnerable to extreme events, which are becoming more violent and unpredictable with climate change.

I also want to note the extent to which FAO's new approach to partnerships is being adopted in the region. We are working much more closely with governments, with international and regional institutions, with civil society organizations and with the private sector to advance towards our goal of a food secure and sustainable world.

Collaboration encompasses the Zero Hunger Challenge, the Save Food Asia-Pacific Campaign, and the International Year of Family Farming 2014. We are also supporting the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

We have also completed the Country Programming Frameworks in all countries of the Region. In practical terms, this means that the national, subregional, regional and global priorities that you have defined for FAO's work are fully aligned.

As you can see, we have done a lot. But our work will only matter if we transform this vision into reality.

It is time to implement our Program of Work. And the renewed FAO is now swinging into action. The main instruments we have to deliver results at the regional level are the regional initiatives.

We have four regional initiatives to respond to priorities you identified at the last Regional Conference. They are:

The Zero Hunger Challenge in Asia and the Pacific.

The second phase of the Regional Rice Initiative. As you may recall, the first phase was implemented last year and we are now following up with country level actions.

The Regional Blue Growth initiative, to guarantee that we use the vast water resources in the Region in a sustainable way.

And the regional initiative to develop local value chains for food security and nutrition in Pacific Island Countries.

These regional initiatives have been presented at the senior officers meeting. I hope to have your support in their implementation, and to receive your comments and suggestions on how we can make them even more useful.

My dear friends,

Let me take this opportunity to invite you to join the celebration of the 2014 International Year of Family Farming, that FAO is honored to coordinate on behalf of the United Nations System.

This observance is of special significance for the Region. The Philippines was one of the first and strongest supporters of the International Year. And we have to close this international year with a big event in the Philippines.

Family farmers, fishermen, forest collectors and the traditional and indigenous community play a key role in ensuring food security, preserving traditional food products, and safeguarding the world's biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources.

This International Year is an opportunity to place the spotlight on this group of people. A group that already does so much for food security but that, at the same time, is among the world's most vulnerable population.

This group already does so much with so little, imagine if it received greater support from governments.

Let us therefore work together, particularly at the national level, to reposition family farming at the centre of agricultural, environmental and social policies on the national agendas, by identifying gaps and opportunities to promote a shift towards a more equal and balanced development.

Each of us here today has an important part to play in helping family farming fulfil its potential and make this International Year a success.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have spoken a lot about what we are doing inside FAO, but this is relevant only when it has positive effects beyond our walls. That is why I continue to spend significant time speaking to governments and partners in all regions of the world about our work.

We are aware that, to help our Members achieve our main goal of food security, for all we need to be able to offer comprehensive support that ranges from sustainably increasing food production to improved smallholder participation in markets, and from strengthening social protection to building resilience so that we can put an end to hunger and reduce rural poverty.

FAO looks forward to receiving your guidance and views during this Regional Conference.

And I hope that, in the years to come, we will be able to count on the same support you have given to us up to now.

Thank you very much for your attention.