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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-fourth Session

Rome, Italy, 7-11 May 2018

Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

Chairperson,

Honourable Ministers,

Director-General, and

Distinguished Delegates,

1. It is a privilege for me to participate in this 34th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, and an opportunity to address this meeting for the first time in my role as Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council. Before sharing some thoughts on the issues that both the Council and this Regional Conference will focus on, please allow me to convey my appreciation to His Excellency Ghazi Zeaiter, Minister for Agriculture of the Government Lebanon, Chairperson of this Conference.

2. The Regional Conferences are now an integral and important component of FAO's governance structure as they provide the imperative regional perspectives into the programme of work of the Organization. Indeed, one of the important tasks of this 34th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East will be priority setting at the regional level, focussing on the "Organizational Outcomes", which define the results of FAO's work. The priorities expressed by this Session will be taken into consideration in the preparation of the Organization's Programme of Work and Budget for the next biennium.

3. I expect that after fruitful deliberations over the course of this week, Members of the Near East region will provide specific recommendations to the FAO Council and Conference in the final report of this session. I am sure that in doing so, Members will also take into account the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, which are core to the work of the Organization. SDGs 1 and 2 are particularly central to achieving the overall agenda for sustainable development. FAO, with its expertise and technical knowledge, is undoubtedly well positioned to support countries in this region to achieve these goals.

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4. Indeed, 14 of the 17 SDGs are related to FAO's work, and close alignment between SDGs and FAO's Strategic Objectives confirms the considerable potential for FAO to contribute substantially to the implementation of the new global development framework. However, it is clear that, without greater progress in reducing and eliminating hunger and malnutrition by 2030, the full range of SDGs will not be achieved. It is encouraging to note that the decentralized offices will play a key role in supporting countries in the implementation of SDGs.

5. Furthermore, at its 158th Session in December 2017, the FAO Council encouraged continuation of the strong Rome-based Agencies (RBAs) collaboration in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly at the country level.

6. Adjustments to the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) for 2018-19 also reflected the regional priorities, the new Subregional Office for Mashreq Countries (SNM) was established in Beirut with the support of the Government of Lebanon. In addition, the Subregional Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council States and Yemen (SNG) was strengthened following additional support from the United Arab Emirates Government.

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. As you may be aware, the data contained in the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) Report in 2017 was not positive: hunger is on the rise. SOFI estimates that 815 million people suffered from hunger in 2016. This represents an increase of 38 million people compared to 2015, when the number was 777 million. Conflicts are the major cause for severe food insecurity in the region. This data puts the achievement of SDG 2 under threat.

8. The drivers and impacts of migration are intrinsically linked to FAO's global goals of fighting hunger and achieving food security, reducing rural poverty and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. At its 158th Session in December 2017, the FAO Council expressed its appreciation that the Organization will co-Chair the Global Migration Group (GMG) in 2018, together with the International Organization for Migration. This year is going to be important for the future of migration, as UN Member States will adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration as well as the Global Compact on Responsibility Sharing for Refugees. During this Session, you will have the opportunity to provide guidance, from the regional perspective, on GMG priorities for the Near East region.

9. It should also be highlighted that the 158th Session of the FAO Council acknowledged that the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture, as deliberated at the COP23, sets the agriculture and food security agenda for the UNFCCC process and encouraged FAO's efforts in that regard.

10. Water scarcity in the Near East region, intensified by the effects of climate change, poses a threat to food security and nutrition. FAO launched the Global Framework for Action in a Changing Climate "Coping with water scarcity in agriculture" at COP22 in Marrakesh in November 2016. Through this framework, FAO commits to help develop a collaborative effort, based on good science, technology and governance, to address the critical issue of water and food security in a context of climate change.

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. To conclude, I should like to encourage this meeting to bear in mind that as a Governing Body of the Organization, this 34th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East has a unique and

crucial role to play in defining FAO policies. I trust that the Report you will submit to the 159th Session of the Council in June this year with regard to programme and budgetary matters, and to the 41st Session of the FAO Conference in June 2019 with regard to policy and regulatory matters, will clearly spell out the regional views you would like the Organization to act on in the coming biennium.

12. Chairperson, I would like to wish you and the delegates to this Regional Conference fruitful deliberations.

13. Thank you for your attention.