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منظمة  
الأغذية والزراعة  
للأمم المتحدة

# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

## Thirty-fourth Session

Rome, Italy, 7-11 May 2018

### Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Consultation

We, the civil society organizations (CSO) of the Near East and the North Africa (NENA) region, men and women, coming from 11 countries and 20 organizations, constituting of farmers, herders/pastoralists, artisanal fisher folk, consumers, NGOs, human rights movements, women, youth, academics, and indigenous people, met in Beirut, Lebanon on 19–21 February 2018, to develop the contribution of civil society for the 34th Session of the FAO Regional Conference, which will take place in Rome from 7 until 11 May 2018.

The NENA region has for years been plagued by protracted crises resulting from wars that destroyed food production structures, forced millions into forced migration, led to the emergence of human trafficking, hunger and the inability of many to access medicines, safe and healthy food. Therefore,

1. We strongly condemn all practices, whatever their origin that lead to discrimination against citizens on the basis of religion, race, language or affiliation;
2. We affirm that the right of displaced vulnerable farmers in the NENA Region is addressed appropriately by FAO, and we call on all parties to ensure their safe return to their respective countries without any further economic losses;
3. We affirm that land, water and food are fundamental human rights, embodied in international treaties and human rights instruments that all governments must respect, protect and fulfil;

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4. We call for ensuring the human rights of women and young people in a decent life, especially since the situation of women in our region is one of the most concerning in the world. We still need to ensure representation at all levels of decision-making at local, national and regional levels;
5. We call for the respect, protection and fulfilment of the rights of children and the prevention of all forms of their exploitation in work and circumstances depriving them of normal childhood;
6. We call on all working institutions to address the marginalized and those with special disabilities and ensure their integration into society and their right to a decent life;
7. We call for the immediate cessation of practices that use hunger as a weapon and the destruction of civilian infrastructure in the region;
8. Express our absolute solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle against occupation and with their right to liberation, independence and full sovereignty on Palestine;
9. We also affirm our opposition to all forms of autocracies and our solidarity with indigenous people of the region to freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources;
10. Wars and civil conflicts caused the creation of Landless cases in the region due to confiscation, displacement, false developmental plans. This requires a serious stand, taking into consideration that secured ownership is a human right and that sustainable development can only be achieved through small secured ownerships;
10. We declare our solidarity with the struggles of all the peoples of the world for a better future, free from hunger and malnutrition.

We emphasize that civil society organizations are an indispensable source of expertise and initiatives required to reform and evaluate adopted policies, in addition to strengthening food sovereignty in the region. Their role should be acknowledged as a major contributor to food policies and the formulation of strategies for the agricultural sector at the state level. Therefore, we call on FAO to recognize NGOs as full agricultural-development partners concerned with the implementation of programmes.

We call for such consultations to continue, not only once every two years, on the occasion of a fixed agenda of the Regional Conference, and that civil society organizations should be the reference bodies during the inter-sessional periods. The agenda items and the upcoming conference documents also should be linked to the recommendations and outputs of the previous regional conference, such as the rights of women and small farmers.

We call on governments in the region to review privatization programmes and agricultural investment policies, including the Euro-Mediterranean partnership programmes, and free trade agreements, that have impacted food conditions negatively and threaten the livelihood of small food producers as a result of bad practices of transnational corporations in land grabbing, exercising monopolies over seeds and agricultural assets, contaminating water sources and speculation in foodstuffs.

We note that this regional conference, discussed the following priorities:

**Agroecology:** The consultation emphasized the importance of FAO's contribution to the development of agricultural systems in the region, noting that agroecology seeks to realize the

human right to food, by preserving food diversity and improving nutrition, combating climate change, water scarcity and supporting small producers, building a social system that fosters participation in knowledge-production, promoting women's status and regulating the market. Agroecology also contributes to the maintenance of local genetic heritage, but the challenge to develop it must be at the level of an integrated system that includes all components of the diet and ensures sustainability. Agroecology should move from the margins to the centre of existing agriculture policies.

We recognize that the region is rich in experience, through traditional knowledge and practices in agriculture and food production, and we look forward to more-thorough and comprehensive studies toward the achievement of food sovereignty of the region.

We encourage FAO to implement and develop the agroecology approach and to call on countries to comply with all relevant international human rights instruments. In this context, we also hope that this approach will include respect for the rights of women, children and marginalized social groups, whether in rural or urban areas.

**Agricultural transformation:** We emphasize that agriculture plays an important role as a promoter of social development through the creation of employment opportunities and the reduction of migration in general and rural migration, in particular. It should also be noted that migration should be among the priorities of the Regional Office and to be included as an agenda item in the next Regional conference because of its pressing economic nature in the NENA Region. This requires a focus on the root causes of problems to develop strategies to address existing challenges, bearing in mind the impact of wars and internal conflicts on the provision and use of food as a weapon against people as a driver of displacement. We also note that all of our states have ratified the promise that "in no case shall a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence."

**One Health:** We stress the importance of the United Nations' efforts with the World Health Organization (WHO) to address transboundary pests and diseases of plant, animal and fishery, and to be part of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 3: "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" and its target 3.d: "Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks."

We support FAO's systematic efforts to implement the policy products issued by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) within the specificities of our region, and in each country. We also note the need to include pollution caused by war and industrial activities that have contaminated our agricultural areas, as well as the danger of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in farmland.

We reaffirm our interest to cooperate with FAO on these issues to combat hunger, malnutrition and poverty within a comprehensive approach, considering that the states of the region are duty bound under international humanitarian law.

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