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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

**Thirty-sixth Session**

**19-21 October 2020<sup>1</sup>**

**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 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean, and to address this meeting in my role as Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council. The FAO Regional Conferences are being held in a virtual format for the first time, and I am pleased that Members are able to build on the successful experiences of the virtual meetings of the Governing Bodies held earlier in the year. Before sharing some thoughts on the issues that this Regional Conference will focus on, please allow me to convey my appreciation to the Government and people of Nicaragua for their hosting of this important meeting.

2. Latin America and the Caribbean is at the forefront of the global fight against hunger. It is the region which has made the most progress in reducing the percentage and total number of people suffering from hunger in the past twenty years. Latin America and the Caribbean was the first region to commit to completely eradicating hunger by 2025 through the 2025 Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (HFLACI). Eight Member Nations have managed to fully eradicate hunger, fifteen have reduced by half the proportion of people suffering from hunger, and eleven reduced the proportion and total number of undernourished people.

3. Nevertheless, the data contained in the 2020 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) Report shows that hunger is on the rise for a third year in a row. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) was 7.4 percent in 2019, below the world prevalence of 8.9 percent. However, the region has seen a rise in hunger in the past few years, with the number of undernourished people increasing by 9 million between 2015 and 2019.

4. The Covid-19 pandemic and the measures to contain the virus have affected livelihoods, employment, agricultural activities, trade, and more. The novel coronavirus has implications for local, national, regional and global policies and it is important that global and local conditions alike are recognized when confronting this pandemic. Members at this Conference will consider the essential country and region-specific challenges and priorities regarding how the pandemic has affected, and

<sup>1</sup> Rescheduled from 27-29 April 2020, Managua, Nicaragua.

continues to impact, the livelihoods of the populations in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is crucial to enable the Organization to steer its response work in the most effective direction.

5. As you are aware, the Council, at its 164<sup>th</sup> Session, endorsed a reorganization of the FAO headquarters structure to cultivate a more agile, dynamic and fit-for-purpose organization, one that is able to respond quickly and effectively to emerging needs and crises. The new Office of Sustainable Development Goals was welcomed by the recent Session of the Council as an important step towards corporate engagement with Agenda 2030 and in assisting Members in the achievement of the goals as well as their follow-up and review. The strengthening of the Organization's Centres will also enable strong collaboration with other UN Agencies and International Financial Institutions, in line with the repositioning of the UN development system and the need to work in partnerships to address complex and multifaceted issues at the country level.

6. Another flagship innovation of FAO's new Director-General, Dr Qu Dongyu, is the Hand-in-Hand Initiative. This Initiative has been welcomed by the FAO Council and its Committees. It is an inclusive and holistic business model, which aims to forge a broad spectrum of partnerships on the one hand; and leverage FAO's technical capacity and data compendium on the other, in order to deliver on food security and development. It will enable all stakeholders to take their respective responsibilities, in a transparent manner, and to work together towards the achievement of FAO's goals, as well as the SDGs and Agenda 2030.

7. This Initiative is a country-led and country-owned approach, and prioritises those countries whose populations are at risk of being left behind. Priority countries include Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Land Locked Least Developed Countries (LLDCs), as well as countries seeking support to manage the impact of Covid-19 through the Initiative. Activities are underway in a number of countries and the Geospatial Platform has been launched. This week, Members of this Regional Conference will be informed of its key contributions that aim to accelerate progress toward the realization of the SDGs. Through linking different stakeholders, the programme aims to reduce the vulnerabilities of rural poor through improved food system capacities, while utilising FAO's data tools to identify investment gaps.

*Honourable Ministers,*

*Director-General and*

*Distinguished Delegates,*

8. I take this opportunity to remind you of the importance of this Conference in directing FAO to provide effective and targeted support to countries facing key challenges. Given the enhanced role of the Regional Conferences within the governance stream of the Organization since 2009, Members here play a vital role in reviewing FAO's activities in the region and setting priorities for its future work. I am certain that you will conduct this important work with rigour and enthusiasm.

9. As the Organization's current Strategic Framework comes to a close, an important task is ahead of all of us. The 164<sup>th</sup> Session of the Council looked forward to inputs from the Regional Conferences to refine the roadmap for consultations on this important document. The new Strategic Framework, to be adopted by the Conference at its 42<sup>nd</sup> session in 2021, will be the blueprint guiding the direction of the Organization into the future, towards and beyond Agenda 2030. The regional priorities identified at this and other Regional Conferences will shape the basis of decision-making on the future Strategic Framework, which will also be informed by recommendations of the Technical Committees and the guidance of the Council and its Committees.

10. Chairperson, it is clear that urgent action is required to address the challenges of rapidly increasing diet-related health concerns, damage to ecosystems and the threat of climate change. In order to achieve the SDGs by 2030, food systems must be addressed. In 2021, the UN Secretary-General will convene a UN Food Systems Summit, which reflects the prominence that the 2030 Agenda affords to improved health, nutrition and ecosystems, and the key role food systems play in the achievement of these goals.

11. The UN Secretary-General and indeed the FAO Council have recognised the central role of FAO in the Food Systems Summit, and emphasized that Members be fully involved in the preparatory process. In this regard, an informal Group of Friends to the Summit has been established to provide a platform for Members to contribute to the preparations towards the Summit. Members at this Conference will have the opportunity to discuss how to transform food systems to create healthy diets for all, and to provide inputs for the Summit.

12. To conclude, Chairperson, this Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean has a role to play in helping define FAO policies, in establishing the Programme of Work and Budget for the next biennium, as well as the next Strategic Framework. It also has a unique opportunity to give impetus to the drive begun by the Director-General for innovation at FAO, as well as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative. I wish delegates to this Conference fruitful deliberations, and encourage clear outcomes.

13. Thank you for your attention.