

Forty-first session of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean

16 October 2017

- At the outset, I'd like to welcome all participants, including high-level representatives, who came numerous to the 41st session of the GFCM, and express my gratitude to them. A special thanks to the hosting country, Montenegro, that has a strong cooperation with FAO in the context of the ongoing Country Programming Framework 2015-2019. We are pleased to see strong commitment by Montenegro to the work of FAO, including in connection with the Strategic Objective of the Organization, and we remain focused on country priorities identified by Montenegro. This includes fisheries and aquaculture through the work of the GFCM;
- Today, 16 October 2017, marks the celebration of the World Food Day. This is by far the most important FAO sponsored celebration within the United Nations System. I would be remiss without recalling the importance of this day for the international community. Hunger continues to threaten sustainable development of many nations and FAO is at the forefront of the fight against this scourge. We are particularly concerned with food loss and waste, including fish loss and waste. FAO currently estimates that roughly 35% of fish and seafood is wasted, with 8% of fish caught globally thrown back into the sea. In most cases, this fish is dead, dying or badly damaged. We need to halt this negative trend as this is our collective responsibility. RFMOs have an important role to play in this respect;

- The GFCM has pledged last year at its 40th session to revert the negative trend in the exploitation of most commercially exploited stocks at Mediterranean and Black Sea level. To this end, a visionary multiannual strategy has been adopted which is fully consistent with SDG 14 targets and is contributing to accelerate progress towards these targets at the regional level. To the best of my knowledge, the GFCM is the only RFMO that has adopted such a strategy.
- Last June I participated in NY at the Oceans Conference on SDG 14, together with the FAO Director General and the GFCM Executive Secretary, among others. This conference recognized the key contribution that is expected from regional organizations in meeting SDG 14 related targets. These include Target 14.4. that calls upon countries to reduce overfishing, end IUU fishing and bring about the sustainable management of fisheries worldwide;
- These calls have been echoed in Malta 10 days ago at the Our Oceans Conference, where I also participated together with the FAO Director General and the GFCM Executive Secretary. I was pleased to see that among those commitments presented during this conference there was also the mid-term strategy of the GFCM. This means that such instrument has been recognized at the regional level and beyond. As an indicator of its importance I'd like to refer to the Malta Ministerial Declaration MedFish4Ever, adopted last March under the auspices of the EU. I praise such an initiative because the Mediterranean Sea requires strong political willingness to address the many issues that affect fisheries and aquaculture;

- The FAO is pleased to acknowledge progress being made by the GFCM to enhance cooperation in the Black Sea region as well. Last October, a high-level conference was organized under the stewardship of the GFCM in Bucharest. This conference was attended by high-level representatives from all the riparian countries as well as countries in the Black Sea area and resulted in the adoption of the Bucharest Declaration. This marks a formidable milestone in that there is common agreement among Black Sea countries on the need to work together in the interest of their fisheries and aquaculture sector. I'd like in particular to call upon those riparian countries that are yet to become Members to the GFCM to ratify the GFCM Agreement and join the Commission. I am well aware that Georgia and Ukraine have attained Cooperating non-Contracting Party status in the past and I am also aware of the ongoing cooperation between the GFCM and the Russian Federation. I believe though that efforts should be made towards full membership. The same applies, for the Mediterranean region, to Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is also a Cooperating non-Contracting Party to the GFCM. This Commission is also expected to grant the status of Cooperating non-Contracting Party to the Republic of Moldova. This is yet another token of the important work by the GFCM in strengthening cooperation;
- Allow me also to underline the strong contribution that the FAO Regional Projects (AdriaMed, CopeMed, EastMed, MedSudMed) are giving to support sustainability of Mediterranean fisheries. This network of project has been in place for many years now and it has considerably underpinned the work of the GFCM at the country level. With the mid-term strategy in place the role of the projects become even more important and I do encourage strong coordination and synergies between the GFCM Secretariat and the projects. In this regard, I am glad to see that such coordination is already ongoing and that a number of country missions have been fielded together by the GFCM Secretariat and EastMed last month. This should become a trend and a reference point given the Organization's policy to act as one. In this regard, I am positive that FAO offices in the region will also lend support to ongoing endeavors. FAO is implementing a strong coordination policy with regional offices in the interest of all Members to the Organization;
- I wish you success during this week and I am positive you will work with resolve to take important decisions for the management of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, in line with the commitments you have already agreed upon for the sake of the Mediterranean and Black Sea region.