

**Statement delivered by
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Minister for Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan
on the occasion of the
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Thank you very much dear Chairman for giving me an opportunity to provide a statement from Uzbekistan.

Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Graziano Da Silva for his valuable service and sincere commitment to the fight world hunger. His input in food security and sustainable agriculture development is invaluable and highly appreciated by Uzbekistan.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to congratulate Mr Qu Dongyu on his election as the FAO Director-General. It is a demanding and responsible position, yet I am sure his knowledge and expertise in agriculture will be a great contribution to FAO and the member countries. I wish you all the best and success in your new endeavors!

Dear friends, today, Uzbekistan's agriculture comprises almost 30 per cent of our GDP and more than 60 per cent of people live in rural areas. And almost 10 million people are directly involved in the agriculture sector.

Dear friends, we are set to achieve ambitious Goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Today, we need to concrete on actions rather than general promises. In this context, I would like to draw your attention to Uzbekistan's strong commitment to achieve SDG targets and now let me introduce some concrete actions initiated with the leadership of our President, His Excellency, Mr Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

First, Uzbekistan has recently reached a turning point by approving a 5 year Development Strategy and Uzbekistan's ongoing 5-year reform agenda is strongly aligned to the ambitious targets for 2030 agreed under the Global Goals.

The second, this October - on 20 October 2018 the Government of Uzbekistan adopted the resolution "On measures to implement the National Goals and Targets in the field of Sustainable Development for the period until 2030." The document sets 16 national sustainable development goals and 127 related targets. It also envisages gradual integration of sustainable development goals into the state development programmes and budgets of the country. Currently, we are also in the process of reforming the agriculture sector and National Agriculture Development Strategy has been developed with the support of European Union, FAO, World Bank and other international partners.

Third, food systems and agriculture sector has great potential to achieve SDG commitments collectively and jointly through transfer of knowledge and technologies. Particularly, Government initiated development of National Food Security Programme to achieve the national indicators under SDG-2.

The alarming rise in the world hunger numbers puts under pressure the Zero Hunger target of SDG-2. We still have a danger a rise to up to 1 billion of hunger-stricken population which is a dreadful future for the whole world.

Fourth, our Strategy prioritizes the regional cooperation as a vital instrument for the development of entire Central Asian region and it promotes widening the close cooperation with our neighboring countries in Central Asia, including Afghanistan and further.

We have managed to eliminate trade barriers, simplified trade procedures, and resolved long-lasting issues within the Central Asia. As a result, only in 2018, the trade turnover of Uzbekistan with the Central Asian countries grew by 40% and millions of people they started to cross each other countries.

Particularly, our trade, cultural and transport connectivity strengthened with Afghanistan and it is great achievement for the people and farmers of our countries.

Uzbekistan taking serious steps to implement the SDG-5 “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. We have completed the country’s gender assessment in the agriculture sector together with FAO and today I would like to highlight particular role of woman and youth in the development of food systems and agriculture development, so this is the integral part of Agriculture Development Strategy.

Comprehensive indicators were set by the Government in the area of sustainable water and land resources management under SDG-6. The Government of Uzbekistan committed to reclaim over 1 million hectares of land by effectively using the water and the land resources.

Another critical challenge is that we have already learned a disastrous lesson from the recent history in our region related to the drying the Aral Sea which was the 4th largest lake in the world in 1960s and this catastrophe caused due to the unsustainable agriculture policies and practices.

Currently, the Aral Sea region is facing several environmental, social and economic disasters. Dust and the sand storms moving to other regions and countries, and even to some parts of the Europe. Last year, Uzbekistan carried out 500 thousand hectares afforestation activities in the dried bottom of the Aral Sea. This will continue every year until we achieve at least a total of 1,5 million hectares of afforestation in this region in order to tackle the environmental consequences of the Aral Sea.

With the initiative of the country, the Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea region was established jointly with the United Nations. Uzbekistan pledged the first financial contribution to the Trust Fund and we would like to thank all the participating governments for their contributions to the Trust Fund. A special thanks to the European Union for contributing to the Trust Fund as well.

I think, this can be real example of joint work to achieve the SDG targets. Further I would like to call on our friends and partners to join our efforts, as Uzbekistan and our countries in the region have historical and long term experience on agriculture development in the region. We are ready to share our expertise with every country in the region and beyond.

Last, but not least, let me express our gratitude to all countries for your support and decision to organize the FAO 32nd session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) in Uzbekistan next year in May.

It is great pleasure and honor for us to host such an important event for the first time in the Central Asian region. I assure you that the Republic of Uzbekistan will do all the necessary efforts to host this event at the highest organizational level and I would like to invite high level delegations from the region to Uzbekistan to the next FAO Regional Conference for Europe.