



## **FAO 35th REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST**

**Mr. Qu Dongyu, General Director**  
**Mr. Chairman,**  
**Excellencies,**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to thank first the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for holding its 35<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference for the Near East under the theme “Transforming Food Systems to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” and the Sultanate of Oman for convening virtually this Regional Conference for the Near East. I would like to also seize this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to the preparation of this meeting.

It is with great pleasure that I am joining you at this Regional Conference for the Near East. This meeting will provide guidance in areas of high priority for FAO during the years 2020-2021 and even beyond.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The proportion of the undernourished population in Tunisia was approximately 4.3% during the period 2016-2018, compared to 5.6% from 2004 to 2006. Tunisia is also ranked 69<sup>th</sup> out of 113 countries according to the World Food Security Index, which takes into account key issues such as access, availability, quality and safety of food.

Hence, the Tunisian state policy has set the objectives of reducing population growth in extremely poor areas, providing safe access to food supplies, as well as developing programs to enhance food and water security, targeting cereal-based foods. This policy has been

further strengthened by a national project aiming at affording decent living for needy families through direct cash transfer.

There is, in addition, a need to make agriculture more resilient to natural disasters and climate change effects, in particular to drought. For this purpose, Tunisia has established a “compensation fund for agricultural damages caused by natural disasters”. The country is also working on establishing a “Maghreb emergency food security fund to face animal and plant pests”, and is seeking to establish the “Maghreb Observatory for Early Warning of Drought”.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

SDG 2 «Zero hunger» is a priority of our present and future policies and Tunisia is implementing the recommendations of the Tunis Declaration announced on the 18<sup>th</sup> session of the Maghreb Ministerial Committee on Food Security.

Food security, promotion of sustainable agriculture and climate change resilience are among the objectives of the Five-Year Development Plan 2016-2020. As a consequence, plans have been put into practice, relying on scientific research and human involvement.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The agricultural sector is the most vulnerable to climate change, so are most African and Arab countries. Thereby, important measures have been set up such as:

- Adopting sustainable agricultural methods,
- Applying modern and smart farming techniques, and
- Establishing financial mechanisms to meet the expected qualitative and technological changes.

Tunisia is implementing its National Climate Change Adaptation Plan to enhance the adaptation of agricultural activity, ensure food security, protect its coast, preserve its water resources, as well as

promote health and infrastructure conditions, within the framework of the funding supplied by the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the international institutions involved in climate change adaptation and mitigation for their willingness to support Tunisia.

I would also like to express our willingness to further strengthen cooperation between Tunisia and FAO through new projects aiming at updating the agricultural map and at preserving natural resources, particularly water.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The latest months marked by the Covid-19 pandemic had major impacts on agriculture such as:

- Disruption in the supply of inputs;
- Troubles in many vital sectors (mainly transport) and problems in carrying out administrative and agricultural tasks;
- Marketing and supply disruption;
- Declining demand for many products (restaurants and hotels);
- Logistical difficulties and border closures.

In April, a significant decline of agri-food exports has been witnessed: 46% for dates, 47% of fishery products and 19% of vegetables compared to the same month last year. This has had a significant impact on farmers' incomes and other segments of the economy.

The Ministry has intervened to minimize the effects of these disturbances by changing certain regulations, modifying laws, intensifying supervision and imposing severe penalties on attempts to damage natural resources.

The country has also implemented a large-scale assistance program to support the most vulnerable social categories and farmers.

Tunisia supports the establishment of an Arab platform for both the demand and supply of agricultural products in order to cope with the impacts of the Corona crisis and to provide exhaustive information on food surplus available for exportation to the Arab countries, and also strongly approves the establishment of an “Arab crisis fund” to overcome the challenges of this crisis to provide loans and financial privileges to Arab countries, in particular to the private sector.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

To reduce the impact of the pandemic, we plan to enhance food security for the most vulnerable farmers in rural areas especially rural women and younger farmers, to support the fields most affected by unrest and reduce supply dependency, while promoting digitization (remote work, digitization of official documents and platforms), innovation and partnership (e-commerce and digital applications). The state has also put forward an additional storage infrastructure to complete an export platform in order to better take into account risks and opportunities with promising markets. These have led to an action plan that still requires additional funding.

The Plan aims at preventing eventual food insecurity. It was supported by FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and World Food Program. We would also like to stress the contribution of the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the French Agency for Development and the Technical Cooperation of Germany who helped us to restructure some ongoing cooperation projects for the redeployment of part of their budget to support urgent actions.

The intended action plan aims at:

- Expanding and improving access to healthy food and social protection;
- Supporting small farmers to maintain both production and productivity with the ability to supply markets;

- Speeding up the use of communication and information technologies.

Preserving plant health, controlling pests and pathogens ravaging crops are at the core of the food security system. The country is working for the expansion of an Early Warning and Surveillance Networks with model software.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This event provides an opportunity to share and exchange experiences between sister countries in the agriculture field in order to meet the challenges of food and water security and face the impact of pandemics and natural disasters.

Once again I wish a large success to this Conference.

Akissa Bahri

Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries