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Statement by the Director-General

Excellency Mr. Faruk Celik, Minister of Food, Agriculture and Livestock of the Republic of Turkey and elected Chairperson of the 30th Regional Conference for Europe;

Honourable Ministers;
Excellencies;
Distinguished delegates;
Ladies and gentlemen,

1. I would like to start, thanking once again the Government and the people of Turkey for their support, hospitality and warm welcome.
2. FAO's Regional Conferences in 2016 are very timely, since the UN Member Countries have just initiated the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs.
3. This Conference is a great opportunity for a reflection at the regional level on how to move forward to achieve sustainable development.
4. The latest Regional Overview of Food Insecurity for Europe and Central Asia shows that this region, as a whole, has achieved the Millennium Development Goal of reducing by half the proportion of people affected by hunger, compared to the 1990/92 base period.
5. Currently, in this region, less than 5 percent of the population, which accounts for nearly 6 million people, are undernourished. The absolute number of hungry people has fallen by at least 40 percent since 1990.
6. But despite overall positive trends regarding food security, others forms of malnutrition still persist and continue to be a problem, affecting all the nations in this diverse region.

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7. In 48 out of the 53 countries in the region, the combined overweight and obesity prevalence in the adult population exceeds 55 percent – more than half. Obesity levels alone are over 20 percent.

8. Furthermore, we continue to see relatively high rates of stunting among children – particularly in the Caucasus and Central Asia countries.

9. Due to the complex nature and multiple causes of malnutrition, improving nutrition requires the collaboration of multiple sectors, including agriculture, health, education, trade, environment and social protection.

10. Many countries in this region have already started to take action to improve nutrition by seeking to transform food systems, from production to consumption, and provide healthier diets to their populations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. Ending all forms of malnutrition, especially hunger, is just one of the global goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

12. We also have to eradicate extreme poverty all over the world, combat the impacts of climate change, reduce inequalities, promote decent work, and sustain and preserve natural resources. All this in the next 15 years.

13. The 2030 Agenda calls for new combinations in the way policies, programmes and investments should pull together.

14. FAO's advice to its Member Countries has been to establish internal mechanisms of governance that include different ministries and public institutions, as well as other relevant stakeholders such as the private sector and civil society.

15. FAO will seek to strengthen its capacity to act as a facilitator of this inter- institutional and inter-sectoral dialogue, in order to support national implementation of the SDGs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

16. Rural areas will continue to be at the heart of our efforts for the next biennium in this region. The majority of the poor and hungry people in this region live in rural areas.

17. One of the ongoing Regional Initiatives addresses key problems of rural people by empowering smallholders and family farmers, and improving their livelihoods and resilience.

18. Assisting poor rural people is also important to improve the nutrition of the population, promote the sustainable use of natural resources and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

19. FAO also will support countries in their transition to climate-smart agriculture and organic farming by fostering innovation, research and the exchange of knowledge.

20. Trade, economic and market integration will remain important challenges in the coming years, including the alignment to WTO commitments and the further strengthening of value chains and institutional frameworks for food safety and animal health – two major issues in this region.

21. All this is part of the second Regional Initiative, with the aim of improving the agri-food trade policy for small and medium enterprises.

22. Not to forget the discussion on reducing food loss and waste, which was the main agenda item of the last Regional Conference.

23. We have implemented the technical platform on the measurement and reduction of food loss and waste in cooperation with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and in line with the request made by the G20 Ministers of Agriculture.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

24. Another important item on the agenda of this Conference is the review of the Decentralized Offices Network.

25. FAO is seeking to update the coverage of its decentralized offices, in order to have more efficiency.

26. The document on this agenda item presents the proposed principles and criteria to promote this review process.

27. As you know, this issue has been discussed by the Governing Bodies in Rome. Inputs from the Regional Conferences will be added to the document presented at the last Council Session in December, for decision in the next Session in June.

28. I would like to highlight that this is the first time that this theme has been discussed in the Regional Conference. I would like to draw your attention to this issue not only from a country perspective, but also bearing in mind the need to improve FAO's work in the region as a whole.

29. And let me observe that three new country offices have been proposed in Albania, Moldova and Uzbekistan, as well as the Partnership and Liaison Offices already open in Azerbaijan and in Kazakhstan. Finally, let's not forget that the Liaison Office in the Russian Federation has been operational since last January.

30. Despite all these efforts, we need to look for a better coverage in some subregions.

Distinguished delegates,

31. I would like to conclude by emphasizing the importance of achieving sustainable development for a safer and more peaceful world.

32. In fact, sustainable development and peace are interdependent. There is no sustainable development without peace. And there is no peace without sustainable development.

33. And providing food security is essential for achieving both sustainable development and peace.

34. As you know, I have recently addressed the UN Security Council, to highlight the contributions of food security and agriculture to prevent conflicts and crises, and build stable and peaceful societies. It was the first time that FAO addressed the Security Council.

35. Next week, in Rome, we will launch the FAO-Nobel Prize Laureates Alliance for Food Security and Peace to further explore this strong relationship between conflict and hunger. We already have several Nobel Laureates who have confirmed their presence.

36. FAO's message will be that where there is conflict, there is hunger. And where there is hunger, there can be no lasting peace.

37. The right to adequate food is a human right, and needs to be for all.

38. Freeing the world of hunger and extreme poverty is our fight. No one must be left behind.

Thank you for your attention.