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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-third Session

Rome, Italy, 9-13 May 2016

Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Director-General,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished Delegates,

It is again a privilege for me to participate in this 33rd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, and an opportunity to address you in my role as Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council. Before sharing some thoughts on the issues that both the Council and this Regional Conference will focus on, please allow me to convey my appreciation to the Government of Lebanon for the organization of this Conference.

When I addressed the last session of this Regional Conference, during my first term of office, a comprehensive review of governance reforms and their effectiveness was under way. Indeed, many of you who were present in Rome in 2014 had the opportunity to interact with a member of the Review Team, and to offer regional perspectives on FAO's reformed governance structure, including the Regional Conference's relatively new role as FAO Governing Bodies.

In this regard, I should like to highlight two recommendations regarding Regional Conferences made by the Review Team in its final report, and endorsed by the 39th Session of the FAO Conference in June 2015. The first regards priority setting at the regional level, which should focus on the "Organizational Outcomes", which define the results of FAO's work as measured by indicators and targets. It is at this level that the priorities expressed by the Regional Conferences will be taken into consideration when formulating areas of emphasis and outputs to be produced, in alignment with regional and sub-regional priorities and initiatives – matters this Regional Conference will address during its deliberations this week. Indeed, the FAO Conference endorsed the call for Regional

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Conferences to move away from general discussions on FAO's work in the region in favour of using the Reviewed Strategic Framework to highlight specific FAO activities that Members perceive as particularly relevant to the region. The second recommendation regarded the need for Members to have better access to results-based information to be able to gauge progress made in approved regional programmes.

Chairperson, in keeping with these recommendations, you will have the opportunity to consider the results of FAO's work in the region under item 12. Your discussions will be informed by the results of FAO's work described in the background documentation. I trust Members will take into account the guidance given by the FAO Conference, and offer clear advice to the FAO Conference and Council in the final report of this session as regards the regional priorities that you wish to see reflected in the forthcoming Programme of Work and Budget. I am sure that in doing so, Members will also take into account the Sustainable Development Goals approved by the United Nations in September last year.

FAO, with its skills and knowledge, is undoubtedly well positioned to support countries in this region to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Indeed, 14 of the 17 SDGs are related to FAO's work, and close alignment between the SDGs and the FAO Strategic Objectives confirm the considerable potential for FAO to contribute substantially to the implementation of the new global development framework. It is clear, however, that without greater progress in reducing and eliminating hunger and malnutrition by 2030, the full range of SDGs will not be achieved. I should also like to add that it is encouraging to see that the decentralized offices will play a key role in supporting countries in the implementation of the SDGs.

Chairperson, this leads me to draw your attention to recent discussions on how to bring the coverage of FAO's decentralized offices to synchronize with new global needs and challenges. The last session of Council in December 2015 examined an Independent Review of the FAO Decentralized Offices Network, in keeping with a FAO Conference request to review the types and coverage of representation in countries, and the location of Regional and Subregional Offices. While appreciating the need for change, and acknowledging the comprehensive technical analysis of decentralized offices submitted, the Council was also very aware of the need to take a region-specific approach to any adjustments to the network, with the involvement of concerned regional actors.

Hence, the Independent Review will be discussed by the 2016 round of Regional Conferences, and the regional perspectives expressed at each Regional Conference will be taken into consideration at the next session of Council in May-June this year. All of the options regarding coverage set out in the Independent Review relate to improving the capacity of FAO to deliver its Programme of Work, and to achieve the results called for in the Strategic Framework as effectively as possible. The regional perspective will add value to the discussion to take place at the Council, as regards programme and budgetary matters, and to the Conference in 2017 as regards any references to global governance and policy issues, or international frameworks arising from your deliberations at this session.

Chairperson, hence, once again, I call upon this Regional Conference to offer clear advice on how to improve the quality and effectiveness of FAO's decentralized offices in the report of this session. In simple terms, the clearer the advice you give in the report of this session, the more likely your advice is to be considered and acted upon by the other FAO Governing Bodies.

Ladies and gentlemen, shortly after the last round of Regional Conferences FAO hosted the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), a key global event on nutrition, jointly organized by FAO and WHO. You will recall that, at its last session, this Regional Conference had before it a document on the preparations for, and the expected outcomes of, ICN2. Subsequently, the two outcome documents, that is the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and the Framework for Action, were adopted in November 2014 by high-level participants at ICN2, who pledged their country's commitment to eradicating hunger and malnutrition and transforming food systems to achieve better nutrition. The Rome Declaration on Nutrition and the Framework for Action were later endorsed in various international forums. In particular, they were welcomed by the UN General Assembly in July 2015, as well as through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015.

At its 150th Session, the Council expressed its appreciation of how ICN2 had given sharp global focus on improved nutrition and food security, as well as on the efforts being made across the UN system to improve coordination of nutrition issues by strengthening existing mechanisms. As you are no doubt aware, the Committee on World Food Security was identified as the most appropriate intergovernmental and multi-stake global platform on nutrition and ICN2 follow-up.

Delegates at this session now have the opportunity to provide guidance from the regional perspective on ICN2 matters of particular relevance to the region, and on the way ahead. The Regional Conference may also wish to encourage resource partners to make voluntary contributions to support FAO's nutrition work in the region.

Chairperson, to conclude, I should like to encourage Delegates to bear in mind that, as a Governing Body, this Regional Conference for the Near East has a unique role to play in helping define FAO policies, and in establishing the Programme of Work and Budget for the next biennium. I trust that the Report you will submit to the Council in May-June this year, and to the Conference in July 2017, will clearly spell out the regional perspectives you would like the Organization to act on in the coming biennium.

I would like to wish this Regional Conference fruitful and harmonious deliberations, and clear outcomes.

Thank you for your attention.