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Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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Unies pour l'alimentation
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Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
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منظمة
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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-third Session

Rome, Italy, 9-13 May 2016

Statement by the Director-General

His Excellency Mr. Akram Chehayeb, Minister of Agriculture of Lebanon, and Chairperson of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East;

Mr. Wilfred Ngirwa, Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council;

Her Excellency Ambassador Amira Gornass, Chairperson of the World Food Committee;

Honourable Ministers;

Excellencies;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is an honour to address you at this Regional Conference for the Near East.
2. The Conference offers a great opportunity to reflect / at the regional level / on how to move forward / to overcome the many challenges ahead.
3. As we all know, the United Nations Member Countries / have just begun to pursue / the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs.
4. Food and agriculture lie at the very heart of the 2030 Agenda,/ especially regarding the SDGs number 1 and 2 / of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in 15 years-time.
5. Nearly 80 percent / of the world's extremely poor and hungry people / live in rural areas.

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6. In the Near East and North Africa region, 15 out of 19 countries have achieved the Millennium Development Goal target / of halving the proportion of undernourished people.
 7. Let me congratulate the State of Kuwait and the Sultanate of Oman / for having also achieved / the more ambitious World Food Summit target / of halving the total number of hungry people.
 8. But despite these positive figures,/ the region as a whole has witnessed / a serious setback in its fight against hunger.
 9. There has been a 30 percent increase / in the prevalence of undernourishment.
 10. The total number of hungry people has doubled,/ and now stands at nearly 33 million.
 11. The vast majority of these people affected by food insecurity / live in Iraq, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, as well as in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
 12. In these countries and areas,/ conflict has been the main driver of protracted crises.
 13. In Syria, 6.5 million people have been internally displaced,/ while more than 4.8 million have fled to the neighbouring countries and elsewhere / as refugees.
 14. Half of the Syrian population that remains in the country / is in need of food assistance.
 15. FAO has been working with its partners / to strengthen the food security and resilience / of the most affected people.
 16. Not only to mitigate impacts,/ but also to set the foundations for post-crisis recovery.
 17. The NENA region is also facing / an unprecedented escalation in water scarcity.
 18. The average availability of fresh water per capita / stands at just 10 percent of the world average.
 19. Water scarcity is rising / as urban populations grow / and divert it from agriculture,/ with negative consequences for food security and the rural economy.
 20. In addition, climate change compounds / the already dire natural resource situation in the region.
 21. It exacerbates existing vulnerabilities to natural hazards / such as drought.
- Ladies and Gentlemen,
22. FAO has been working to implement / the set of recommendations approved in the last Regional Conference in 2014.
 23. The three Regional Initiatives have started to show positive results.
 24. The first Initiative, “building resilience for Food Security”, gives priority to supporting resilience interventions / in countries affected by protracted crises.
 25. Under this Initiative, for instance, FAO and its partners / have provided assistance to more than 300.000 (three hundred thousand) families in Syria / in the last 24 months.
 26. Country-specific plans of action,/ with a strong resilience component,/ have also been initiated in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

27. This Initiative also supports / the implementation of the Regional Strategic Framework for Food Loss and Waste Reduction.
28. On nutrition, FAO has helped countries to set up national multistakeholder committees / to follow up on the Second International Conference on Nutrition.
29. The Organization has also facilitated a regional dialogue among member countries, civil society, the League of Arab States and development partners.
30. Regarding the Second Regional Initiative / on Small-Scale Agriculture / FAO has promoted interventions that address some key areas,/ such as governance and institutions,/ capacities of producer organizations,/ social protection / and youth employment.
31. The Initiative has also provided assistance / to projects aimed at improving smallholders' productivity / through improved extension systems / and easier access to markets.
32. The third Regional Initiative / on Water Scarcity / has supported the implementation of the "Regional Collaborative Strategy / on Sustainable Agricultural Water Management / and Food Security".
33. In order to assist countries in tracking / and monitoring water efficiency and productivity,/ the Initiative has initiated actions / to develop systems for benchmarking, monitoring and reporting on water use,/ including through remote sensing.
34. Despite the significant challenge / that resource mobilization efforts face in the region / due to political instability and insecurity,/ the resources mobilized for NENA amounted to 83 million US dollars in 2014, and 61 million US dollars in 2015.
35. The total delivery for the biennium reached USD 154 million,/ representing an increase of 8% percent / compared to the previous biennium.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

36. Another important agenda item / is the review of the Decentralized Offices Network.
37. FAO is seeking to update the coverage of its decentralized offices,/ in order to have more efficiency / and better conditions to assist Member Countries / in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
38. The document on this agenda item / presents the proposed principles and criteria / to promote this review process.
39. The inputs from the Regional Conferences / will be added to the document presented at the last Council Session / in December.
40. This is the first time / that this matter has been discussed.
41. 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.

Ladies and gentlemen,

42. I would like to conclude / by emphasizing the importance of achieving sustainable development / for a safer and more peaceful world.
43. As recognized by the 2030 Agenda,/ there is no sustainable development without peace,/ and there is no lasting peace without sustainable development.

44. Providing food security is essential for achieving both: sustainable development and peace.
45. As many of 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.
46. Yesterday, here at FAO Headquarters, we launched the FAO-Nobel Prize Laureates Alliance for Food Security and Peace / to further explore this strong relationship / between conflict and hunger.
47. Later today, we will have a side event / to discuss how food security and agriculture could better contribute / to promoting and reinforcing peace in the region.
48. FAO's conviction is that where there is conflict, there is hunger. And where there is hunger, there can be no lasting peace.

Thank you for your attention.