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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Thirty-fourth Session

Nadi, Fiji, 9–13 April 2018

Statement by the Chairperson of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific

*Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of the Government of Malaysia, it is an honour and a pleasure for me to be here today to address the thirty-fourth session of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC) in this beautiful Denarau Island of Fiji.

As you know, Malaysia had the honour of hosting the thirty-third session of APRC in Putrajaya two years ago, from 7 to 11 March 2016. The Regional Conference was attended by 193 delegates, including 13 Ministers and 10 Vice-Ministers representing 44 Member Country delegations plus 71 delegates as observers. Observers in attendance included one non-member nation, eight international non-governmental organizations and 34 intergovernmental organizations. Representatives of six other United Nations organizations also participated. The session was chaired by the Minister for Agriculture and Agro-based Industry of Malaysia.

The thirty-third session of the APRC considered several regional and global policy and regulatory issues such as state of food and agriculture in the region; revitalizing the rural economy through enhanced linkages between small-scale agricultural production and value chains; promoting national nutrition policies and investments, and integrating nutrition objectives into food and agricultural policy, programme design and implementation; and Blue Growth.

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Following the deliberations on these issues, the Regional Conference highlighted challenges related to the adverse effects of climate change, frequent natural disasters, environmental degradation, increasing demands on land and water resources, changing demographics affecting the agriculture sector, and animal and plant pests and diseases. It recognized the important roles of smallholders, family farmers and fishers in contributing to food security and nutrition and called for efforts to enhance the capacity to more effectively link with modern value chains. The APRC emphasized capacity building, research and development, technology transfer, robust data collection and analysis, sound agricultural policies and strategies, infrastructure development and increased investment in the agriculture sector as key needs. It stressed the need to increase sustainable agricultural production and productivity, reduce food loss and waste, and facilitate transparent, open and efficient trade of food to accelerate progress towards food security and nutrition in the region.

The Regional Conference underlined the need for continuity in strategic direction of the Organization and appreciated the alignment between the FAO Strategic Objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in guiding future actions in agriculture, food security and nutrition, and welcomed alignment of FAO's Strategic Objectives with the SDGs. The Regional Conference highlighted the importance of mobilizing investment and strengthening collaboration with partner organizations at global, regional and national levels, including with research institutions, multilateral development institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector and other regional and international organizations. The Regional Conference emphasized the value of regional sharing of knowledge, experiences and expertise, including through South-South cooperation. It appreciated steps taken to decentralize roles, responsibilities, authorities and resources and urged FAO to continue such decentralization efforts, whilst improving the technical capacity of the Organization.

The APRC supported continuation of the Regional Initiatives for the 2016-17 biennium to help focus FAO actions on priorities of the region: Support to the Zero Hunger Challenge in Asia and the Pacific, Regional Rice Initiative, Sustainable Intensification of Aquaculture for Blue Growth, and Developing Local Value Chains for food security and nutrition in the Pacific Island Countries. It requested FAO to address the challenges facing countries in the region concerning nutrition and food safety; inclusive value chain development; food waste and loss; transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases, sustainable production and resilience in the context of climate change; and data and analysis for decision making, monitoring and evaluation.

The conference considered the Report on the meeting of the South West Pacific Agriculture Ministers in Papua New Guinea in May 2015, including the Ministerial Communiqué and encouraged FAO's technical collaboration with support to agricultural development in the subregion. The Regional Conference also requested FAO to reflect the priority recommendations of the Meeting of the South West Pacific Agriculture Ministers in future work, and provide follow-up support in the form of Technical Cooperation Programme projects and other relevant support.

The Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) updated the Regional Conference on the main outcomes of the CFS since the previous APRC in 2014 and the relevance of this work to the FAO Regional Conference. In particular, the Chairperson noted the CFS endorsement of the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems and the Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises. She also updated the conference on the main activities to be carried out by the committee in 2016-2017.

Furthermore, the Regional Conference took note of the major actions, results and priorities for FAO activities in Asia and the Pacific, covering achievements in 2014-15 and proposed actions in 2016-17 and beyond. In this regard, it welcomed the actions undertaken and results achieved through the four Regional Initiatives and supported continuation of the Regional Initiatives for the 2016-17 biennium to help focus FAO actions on priorities of the region. The meeting also noted issues relating to decentralization and the prioritization of country and regional needs recognizing the need to update the coverage of FAO offices, in order to adapt to current developments and requirements.

The conference reviewed and endorsed the draft Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2016-2019 for the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific.

An informal Ministerial Round Table on Youth in Future Agriculture: Towards a Productive and Sustainable Asia-Pacific stimulated interesting discussions on this highly relevant topic. The meeting stressed the need for uplifting the quality of life in rural areas to retain youth in agricultural activities.

The Chair of the Regional Conference reports about its outcomes to FAO's governing bodies at the global level. In accordance with this arrangement, on behalf of the Chairperson of the APRC, Datuk Seri Dr Ismail Hj. Bakar Secretary General, Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry, Malaysia, who also chaired the Senior Officers Meeting of the thirty-third session of the APRC, presented the Summary of the Main Recommendations of the Regional Conference for the attention of the FAO Council during its 154th session held from 30 May to 3 June 2016. Likewise, Dato' Sri Haji Tajuddin bin Abdul Rahman, Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry had the honour to present the Summary of the Main Recommendations for the attention of the 40th Session of the FAO Conference held in Rome from 3 to 8 July 2017. The FAO Conference endorsed the report and took note of the recommendations presented therein. It expressed its gratitude to Malaysia, the host country, for the excellent organization of the Regional Conference.

We are pleased that the Senior Officers Meetings earlier this week substantively discussed progress made on FAO's priorities in the region during 2016-17 and the priorities for the current biennium. We have noted that three of the regional initiatives will continue in the next biennium and two new ones will be taken up. These priorities for FAO's work are very important and we hope they will build on the earlier achievements and enhance FAO's contributions to agricultural and rural development and food security in the Asia and the Pacific region.

I thank you for your kind attention and express my full confidence that this Regional Conference will meet its objectives and provide sound policy guidance to FAO.