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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Thirty-seventh Session

Quito, Ecuador, 28 March – 1 April 2022

Statement by the Director-General

*Your Excellency, Minister Pedro Álava González, Chairperson of the Conference,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I wish to thank the Government of Ecuador and His Excellency President Lasso, for hosting the 37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean.
2. Ecuador hosted the first ever FAO Regional Conference in 1949, shortly after the end of the Second World War.
3. Now, 77 years later you are hosting us once again –also at a critical time for the world, when we must deal with some of the greatest challenges to our food and nutrition security.
4. The preparation for this Regional Conference have been very inclusive: 36 consultations took place at the country, subregional and regional levels, involving thousands of participants from governments and parliaments, civil society, the private sector, the scientific and academic community, UN Country Teams, and dozens of partner organizations.
5. We face this moment with a clear roadmap: to transform our agrifood systems to be more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient and more sustainable, as set out in the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31.
6. The Latin America and Caribbean region played a fundamental role during the pandemic to ensure that the health crisis did not become a food crisis.
7. Your success had a positive impact and you must continue this same effort across your agrifood systems to the benefit of global food security.
8. The food you produce and export will influence the nutrition of millions of men, women and children within and beyond this region.
9. And the way in which you develop your agriculture, forestry, fisheries and livestock, will impact the global climate, as well as the ecosystems and biodiversity of each of the countries in the region.
10. This region has a unique wealth: it accounts for 13 percent of the global production value of agriculture and fish commodities; it holds 34 percent of the world available freshwater; and it is the most biodiverse region in the world.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

11. But you also face great challenges.
12. The pandemic has hit Latin America and the Caribbean hard. .
13. Hunger, food insecurity, obesity and poverty are on the rise, and the region's natural resources and ecosystem face degradation.
14. Most recently, your region, together with the rest of the world, is being impacted by the effects of the war in Ukraine, in particular on the price of food and fertilizers.
15. This not only threatens consumers and producers, but can also affect economic recovery from the pandemic.
16. FAO is particularly concerned about the effect on global food security.
17. Our most recent estimates suggest that in the short term, the number of undernourished people can increase by between 7.8 and 13.1 million worldwide.
18. The impacts could be even worse, depending on the course of the conflict.
19. Peace is fundamental to protect people from hunger.
20. During this Regional Conference, I call on you to identify the key multilateral actions that can be taken to reduce the impact of the crisis.
21. No single country is big enough, or powerful enough, to address this problem on its own.
22. You must you act together to achieve more.
23. FAO is ready to do its part, working with you as a region to support these actions.
24. To address the impacts of the crisis, FAO has issued a call for all countries to:
 - Keep global food and fertilizer trade open;
 - Find new and more diverse food suppliers;
 - Support vulnerable groups;
 - Avoid *ad hoc* policy reactions; and
 - Strengthen market transparency and dialogue.

Dear colleagues,

25. The FAO Strategic Framework responds to the challenges of your current agrifood systems through a concerted and systemic approach, and is built on the four aspirations of *better production*, *better nutrition*, *a better environment*, and *a better life* for all, leaving no one behind.
26. The four betters reflect the interconnected economic, social and environmental dimensions of agrifood systems and rural development, as well as their centrality to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
27. For effective and lasting impact, the entire Strategic Framework and the Four Betters need to be rooted in the realities of your region, with national ownership for their implementation.
28. With ***better production***, the region can consolidate its role as the world's foremost net exporter of food and take advantage of the increasing demand for agrifood products.
29. Latin America and the Caribbean today produces enough food, in caloric terms, to support the lives of approximately 1.3 billion people on Earth, yet this will not be sufficient by 2050 when we will need to nourish almost 10 billion people.
30. ***Better production*** means accelerating the innovations and policies needed to respond to the rise in fertilizer prices, as well as other inputs, a trend that is squeezing our farmers –and we must act immediately.

31. *Better production* also means increased productivity with lower environmental impact through science, innovation and digitalization –you must produce more with less.
32. With ***better nutrition***, you will address the alarming rise in hunger, which has risen to 60 million people, as well as the rise in obesity, which already affects 125 million people. .
33. ***Better nutrition*** can be promoted through legislation and other forms of regulation to discourage the consumption of highly processed foods, and to promote the consumption of nutritious foods.
34. I am pleased to see that this is being done in 23 countries across the region.
35. School feeding programmes, and other social protection initiatives are also needed to increase access to healthy diets, and can quickly improve the lives of people suffering from food insecurity.
36. A ***better environment*** is a pre-condition for sustaining our agrifood systems and agricultural production, and it is also our moral obligation towards present and future generations.
37. Taking care of the water, soils, forests, rivers, and seas must be at the heart of agrifood systems in Latin America and the Caribbean.
38. Recognizing and protecting land tenure rights for indigenous peoples is critical for preventing deforestation and conserving biodiversity.
39. A ***better environment*** also means adapting and increasing the resilience of agrifood systems to the impacts of the climate crisis and reducing their greenhouse gas emissions –which today account for 45 percent of the region’s total emissions.
40. A ***better life*** for all means protecting and preserving the livelihoods many families that were impacted the hardest by the pandemic.
41. A ***better life*** for all also requires a collective effort to reduce territorial, gender, ethnic and rural-urban inequalities.
42. A ***better life*** must be grounded in greater economic opportunities in rural areas, including agricultural development and non-farm activities such as rural tourism.
43. Rural societies have been left behind, and we must make use of innovation to increase their access to the opportunities of digitalization.
44. Better lives also requires equitable international trade and greater integration at the regional and subregional levels.

Dear colleagues,

45. To achieve these Four Betters, the region must step up its efforts to harness science and innovation at all levels of its agrifood systems.
46. FAO has a wealth of resources and knowledge to support country and regional level recovery efforts and to transform agrifood systems.
47. We are committed to work as One FAO, mobilizing resources across the Organization to focus on the three regional priorities you have set:
 - One: sustainable agrifood systems for healthy diets for all;
 - Two: prosperous and inclusive rural societies; and
 - Three: sustainable and resilient agriculture.
48. These priorities are at the core of FAO’s flagship initiatives:
49. The **Hand-in-Hand Initiative** can mobilize investment in support of agricultural and rural development, and is already underway in 6 countries of the region.
50. The **1000 Digital Villages Initiative** is helping villages and rural localities in 14 countries to take a giant leap forward in terms of digitalization.

51. Here in Ecuador, we have launched an innovative **Territorial Digital Hub** that we hope to also extend to other countries soon.
52. FAO's **Technical Platform for Family Farming** is accelerating innovations that allow family farmers to integrate new knowledge, science and technology into their production systems.
53. And FAO's **Global Action on One Country One Priority Product** aims to develop sustainable production and value chains for special agricultural products.
54. All these initiatives require greater investment, and for this FAO can be an important partner.
55. In the past two years, we supported 43 investment projects in 19 countries totalling USD 3.8 billion, and increased by 79 percent the resources mobilized by FAO within and for the region.
56. The FAO Technical Cooperation Programme has been catalytic to leverage new investment and financing to support the region's priorities.
57. The Regional Conference is a platform to bring together best ideas, policies, innovations, technologies and ancestral knowledge from Latin America and the Caribbean.
58. And to link them with FAO's latest knowledge, science and advances to the benefit of the region and the world.
59. FAO has the capacity to mobilize knowledge and good practices globally, and to establish partnerships and synergies to make innovation readily available to all.
60. Let us continue to work together in an efficient, effective and coherent manner –we must continue to think big and act concrete
61. Thank you.