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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

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**Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security
(CFS)**

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FAO Director-General QU Dongyu,

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I join the rest of you in expressing my heartfelt condolences over the recent loss of our dear friend and colleague, the Ambassador of Egypt to the Rome-based United Nations (UN) agencies, Ambassador Alaa Roushdy. Ambassador Roushdy was a true gentleman and will be dearly missed. May his soul rest in eternal peace.
 2. Dear colleagues, it is my pleasure to address all of you today.
 3. I would like to start by expressing my deepest gratitude to Director-General QU Dongyu for inviting the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) to this FAO Regional Conference for the Near East.
 4. Director-General, accept our deepest appreciation for the essential support FAO provides to CFS, including on the dissemination of CFS policy products at regional and country levels. FAO's role in hosting the Committee's Secretariat, along with the CFS's High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE), and the significant financial, technical, and political support remain essential to our work.
 5. I assure you of our full commitment to working towards the goal we share with FAO and with the entire UN system, of a world free from hunger, malnutrition and poverty – hand in hand.
 6. Honourable Ministers, we commend the leadership that you and your countries are providing in addressing the run-away global hunger and malnutrition situation. The scale of the challenge calls for urgent and collaborative action. CFS is ready to support your efforts via partnership and collaboration.
 7. Established in 1974, and reformed in 2009, CFS serves as the foremost inclusive UN platform that connects governments and different stakeholders to agree on science-based food security and nutrition guidelines in the context of agrifood systems transformation.
- Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*
8. Supported by the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs), CFS is ALL of us. The CFS policy products belong to ALL of us, and CFS serves us all by being a platform to foster dialogue and achieve global consensus on complex, difficult issues. Among other things, this unique UN platform provides:
 - a. Inspiration, vision and principles.
 - b. Motivation to our governments to move ahead on key issues.
 - c. A “safe space” where policy advice can be formulated based on world class expertise from its HLPE, and the practical experience of all the stakeholders and states that are part of CFS.
 9. Today, 133 CFS Members use our platform to work together with civil society, private sector, Indigenous Peoples and farmer organizations, philanthropic organizations, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), international financial institutions (IFIs), the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, and the United Nations Development System – notably, FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), and UN Nutrition – to address complex food security and nutrition issues.
 10. Among the issues of relevance for this region, we have addressed the multiple challenges of climate change – including water scarcity, land degradation, biodiversity loss – as well as conflict and protracted crises, the COVID-19 pandemic and food systems transformation. You have heard the UN Secretary-General stress the role of the CFS during the September 2021 Food Systems Summit as an essential platform to ensure food security and nutrition for all through sustainable and transformative food systems.
 11. So, for those countries in the Near East and North Africa region that are not yet CFS members, I urge you to join and be part of this family. It is easy, it is free and it is meaningful.

12. I would like to update you on the ongoing work of CFS that has relevance to your region.

First, transforming agrifood systems to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

13. We are committed to continue working with governments, FAO, RBAs, other UN system actors and our various partners to continue driving the adoption of a food systems approach. This will enable us to look at food security issues holistically, and promote the use of our Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition that were adopted in February 2021, and which are extremely relevant for your national pathways and related policies.

Second, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment

14. CFS is currently working on Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment. The guidelines, to be endorsed at CFS 50 in October 2022, will provide a framework for national efforts to advance gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment as a critical ingredient for ending hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all.

15. I would like to thank all of you who provided inputs to the guidelines during the regional consultations held in October 2021. Your inputs will ensure that the guidelines align with regional and national priorities and needs.

16. I encourage countries to continue engaging in this process and use the guidelines, once endorsed, as a useful and relevant tool to address gender issues at the national level.

Third, rural transformation for youth employment and income

17. Tapping the energy and innovativeness of the youth offers an opportunity to advance sustainable food systems. As the Director-General often says, innovation will be critical in this work. At CFS, we are currently working on policy recommendations on Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems, also to be endorsed at CFS 50 in October 2022.

18. The policy recommendations aim to identify and foster opportunities and decent employment for youth in rural areas and across the food systems and value chains. The Zero Draft of the policy recommendations is currently available on the CFS website. I once again encourage you to engage in this process and provide your inputs on these policy recommendations and utilize them once endorsed.

Fourth, transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets for all including making trade work for food security and nutrition

19. As noted, in February 2021, CFS endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition which aim to support countries to eradicate hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by utilizing a food systems lens.

20. The guidelines include a wide range of recommendations aimed at reducing policy fragmentation between relevant sectors, with special emphasis on food, agriculture and nutrition, while also addressing social, economic and environmental sustainability.

21. The guidelines call for governments to improve the availability and access to safe and nutritious food that contributes to healthy diets through sustainable food systems, including through trade that should be in accordance with a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable, multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization.

22. We encourage you to utilize these guidelines. In this context, later this month at Expo Dubai, CFS is organizing a ministerial event on uptake of its guidelines, in partnership with the Government of the United Arab Emirates and FAO. I look forward to seeing most, if not all, of you there. I thank the United Arab Emirates' Minister for her support to the Voluntary Guidelines and this event.

Fifth, towards sustainable recovery and climate change action

23. The CFS Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches endorsed in June 2021 provide guidance to countries and stakeholders in strengthening agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture, and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition.

24. The recommendations underline the importance to improve the sustainability of agriculture and food systems, and the need to reduce their pressure on natural resources and their negative environmental impacts, including in relation to climate change, biodiversity, water and land.

25. In this context, we acknowledge the Government of Egypt for its leadership on climate change including hosting the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 27) later in the year and the United Arab Emirates hosting the subsequent 28th session. We look forward to working closely with you to promote the utilization of relevant CFS products in shaping the COP agenda and outcomes.

Sixth and last, building resilience for food security and nutrition – COVID-19 and the resilience of the region's agrifood systems

26. Given the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all facets of our agrifood systems, the CFS bureau decided that COVID-19 considerations be built into all our ongoing policy convergence work on global food security and nutrition.

Call to action and closing

27. Besides the policy products I have discussed, I urge you to utilize other globally agreed CFS policy instruments that have relevance to the region like the CFS Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises and the CFS Principles of Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems

28. These products are negotiated and agreed upon in the most inclusive process that includes your representatives in Rome. As such, these are your resources, your policy instruments to be adopted and utilized at the country level in the formulation of your policies, strategies, legislations, regulatory frameworks and business models.

29. As I conclude, allow me to once again thank FAO Director-General QU Dongyu, the Regional Office in Cairo, Your Excellencies the Chair and Prime Minister of Iraq for hosting us, and you, honourable Ministers, for your continued support to, and partnership with CFS.