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Statement by the Director-General

His Excellences, the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development of Poland,

Excellences,

Mr Rau, Chairperson of the Regional Conference,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I wish to thank the Government and people of Poland for hosting this important Regional ministerial Conference.
2. These are critical times, and the Europe and Central Asia region is facing the daunting challenges of food and nutrition security.
3. Countries in the region played a key role in helping control the pandemic, and limiting its negative impact on the economy and agriculture sectors, especially in rural areas.
4. Your success goes beyond the region, and you must continue this effort.
5. The way you develop and manage agriculture, forestry, fisheries and livestock influences the global climate and affects the ecosystems and biodiversity of each of the countries in the region, and beyond.
6. We have come together at this Regional ministerial Conference when the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of the war in Ukraine and other humanitarian emergencies around the globe, are negatively affecting our lives, our health, and our economies.
7. It is a very key moment to discuss appropriate responses and to share proven solutions to support policy-makers across the region to address these challenges.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

8. The cost of food, fuel, fertilizer, feed and transportation are higher than ever, and prices for wheat, vegetable oils and other agricultural inputs have been soaring.
9. This additional burden of price increases comes as increased public spending on health services and economic support have already been squeezing national budgets and people's pockets.
10. This overlapping burden has further worsened the situation for the most vulnerable.
11. Supply disruptions from the Russian Federation and Ukraine are already being felt across global agrifood systems.
12. Higher prices for agricultural inputs and production today, will likely lead to lower food productivity in the next season and possibly beyond, resulting in even higher food prices in the months to come.
13. Peace is fundamental to protecting people from hunger.
14. At the Extraordinary Session of the FAO Council in early April this year, FAO reconfirmed its commitment to closely monitor the implications of the war in Ukraine on world food security and agriculture,
15. And pledged to develop immediate, medium- and long-term plans to address the impacts.
16. FAO has been providing Members with regular, comprehensive data analysis on the effects of the conflict on agrifood systems, and will continue to do so in FAO's capacity and within FAO's mandate.
17. FAO also facilitates and leads the emergency response, recovery assistance, and resilience building across agrifood systems, in line with our mandate and capacity.
18. Who will be most affected by this crisis?
19. First, Ukraine, because of the ongoing destruction causing enormous human suffering and leaving production value chains and supply chains destroyed.
20. Second, countries that are highly dependent on the Russian Federation and Ukraine for their food (including raw material for animal feed), fuel and fertilizer supplies, and among them are many low-income, food-importing countries.
21. Third, all consumers in the region and globally, as the increase in food, energy and fertilizer prices is decreasing purchasing power and putting the next harvest at risk.
22. This Regional ministerial Conference is an opportunity to discuss these matters, the prospects, and potential approaches, and I hope that you can find practical solutions to solve and prevent and even greater crisis.
23. It is also a chance to identify key multilateral actions to reduce these impact as soon as possible.
24. The future is in your hand, because you are representatives of FAO Member States and professional ministers who look at the issues of agrifood systems and rural development.
25. FAO has been stressing the need for joint, coordinated action and policy responses.
26. FAO calls on all countries to:

- keep trade in food and fertilizers open, allowing the Russian Federation and Ukraine to meet domestic needs, while also satisfying global demand;
- find new and more diverse food suppliers;
- provide support to vulnerable groups, including internally displaced people, refugees and those directly affected by the war;
- avoid ad hoc policy reactions;
- strengthen global market transparency and enable dialogue and coordination among Members; and
- contain the spread of African swine fever and other transboundary diseases.

Dear colleagues,

27. FAO is staying and delivering in Ukraine, we have reinforced our team on the ground and taken every measure to ensure their safety.

28. The Organization has completed nationwide needs assessments in Ukraine, targeting local administrations and commercial farmers, and conducted household surveys in areas with a significant influx of internally displaced people.

29. The results show that food security is worsening, with 1 in 5 households lacking the resources to meet basic food needs.

30. In terms of agricultural production, the data indicates limited availability of critical agricultural inputs,

31. And almost one-third of farmers reported dysfunctional supply chains and input supply networks,

32. With small-scale producers and subsistence farmers affected the most.

33. The FAO Ukraine Rapid Response Plan for March to December 2022 calls for 115 million US Dollars to reach almost 1 million individuals - approximately 370 000 households - but a large part of the required funds have not been received.

34. With this I have tasked Deputy Director-General Laurent Thomas to take responsibility and also to coordinate all the necessary actions and measures to work for the people, especially those suffering, in Ukraine.

Dear Colleagues,

35. We gather today with a clear vision: to transform our agrifood systems to be more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient and more sustainable.

36. This is also at the core of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31, which is built on the aspirations of the Four Betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life for all, leaving no one behind.

37. I am confident to talk with you, representatives of ministries of agriculture and rural areas: we should start with better production first. Any country – developed or not developed or less developed – want to improve agrifood systems by starting with better production first,
38. And then, by better nutrition. No matter if rich or poor, you need better nutrition.
39. Of course, we have to look at better environment, and the final goal should be better life – not only better livelihood, but also better quality of life.
40. The Four Betters are central to the 2030 Agenda, and the focus of the Strategic Framework is to support Members in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
41. For effective and lasting impact, the Strategic Framework and the Four Betters must reflect the realities of your region, and countries must take ownership for their implementation.
42. As I said so many times, FAO is a country-owned, country-driven organization. So the Regional Conference is to regionalize priorities and global consensus, by taking your ownership, partnership, and leadership to implement at country level.
43. FAO by the Constitution has four functions: first is consultation for agricultural policies – it is a platform for consultation. Second, to collect and disseminate information and data, third is capacity building, and fourth is international normative work, such as the Codex and others.
44. These are the four basic functions of FAO, and the implementation and action plans should happen at country, subregional and regional levels.
45. With better production, the region can consolidate its role as a leader in scientific, innovative and sustainable agricultural practices, and digital agriculture.
46. There are promising, transferable solutions across Europe and Central Asia that can contribute to more efficient and sustainable production and consumption.
47. Better nutrition will help us address the negative impacts of the pandemic on food security and nutrition, and will help us fight hunger and address malnutrition which is of key importance for this region.
48. Better nutrition is not only energy consumption, we need nutritious food and healthy food.
49. Legislation and awareness-raising initiatives can help improve nutrition by promoting healthy, locally produced foods, instead of highly processed foods.
50. But of course, we need highly processed food to cover the basic needs, there is no contradiction here in my opinion.
51. This region is highly diverse in terms of development, natural resources and structural characteristics, so countries face different challenges related to malnutrition.
50. A better environment is a precondition for sustainable agrifood systems, and it is our moral obligation to current and future generations.
51. FAO is helping countries in the region transition towards more climate-resilient and green, sustainable agrifood systems, while protecting biodiversity.
52. Climate extremes and natural disasters are becoming more frequent in the region, and sustainable development is critical to increase resilience to future shocks and reduce greenhouse emissions.

53. In that aspect, we also need more responsible investments.

54. A better life for all means protecting and preserving the livelihoods of people hit hardest by the pandemic, the current war, and other natural disasters.

55. Ensuring a better life for all requires that we combine efforts to reduce all types of inequalities: between the city and the rural areas, between men and women, between rich and poor.

56. Each nation – no matter if big or small, rich or poor – there are big inequalities between the city and rural areas. This is something we really want to look at.

57. And also including the digital divide and the generational gap in Europe and Central Asia; there is a huge digital divide and also a generation gap.

58. We must create greater economic opportunities in rural areas, based on diverse incomes, including rural tourism and other non-farm activities.

59. There is more and more integration of the different sectors – from the primary sector to the second or processing sector, and to the service sector.

Dear colleagues,

60. The countries in this region are in a good position, and have already taken steps towards achieving the Four Betters.

61. FAO is committed to continue working together with you in an efficient, effective and coherent manner to address the impacts of the war, and the long-term implications of the pandemic.

62. As host of the UN Food System Summit Coordination Hub on behalf of the UN System, we are committed to support Members in implementing their national pathways, by providing our technical expertise and mobilizing resources for the 3 regional priorities you have set:

- One: empowering smallholders, family farms and youth;
- Two: transforming agrifood systems to greener; and
- Three: managing natural resources sustainably and preserving biodiversity.

63. Three countries in the region have already joined the FAO One Country One Priority Product Initiative, bringing them closer to realizing sustainable agrifood systems and the SDG targets.

64. This region presents a unique context for implementing the FAO 1000 Digital Village Initiative, which aims to convert villages across the world into digital hubs.

65. FAO has been working closely with the European Union to leverage its rich experience in developing smart villages to enable the digital transformation of other villages in the region.

66. This week we will also launch the Regional Technical Platform on Green Agriculture, which provides a digital, user-friendly and open gateway for sharing information.

67. Green agriculture plays a vital role in transforming local agrifood systems, as it can help lessen the burden on natural resources, while reducing poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

68. I always say that we need to produce more in terms of quantity, diversity, and high quality with less – less input, less negative impact on the environment. Solutions depend on innovation and enabling policies and investment, as well as on science and innovation.

Dear colleagues,

69. The Regional ministerial Conference is your conference.

70. Agrifood systems transformation can only be achieved through your ownership, your political commitment, and your action plans.

71. As Ministers responsible for agriculture, you need to take a leadership role for this transformation and coordination.

72. Thank you for your support, and for supporting farmers in Europe and Central Asia! Support FAO, support yourself, support the world and play your part!

73. Thank you. Thank you Mr Chair.