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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-sixth Session

10-13 January 2022 and 7-8 February 2022

Statement by the Spokesperson of the Private Sector

Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Ministers,
Head of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentleman,

1. On behalf of the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD), the private sector arm of the Islamic Development Bank Group (IsDB Group), it is a great honour to join you at the ministerial meeting. My God give Iraq prosperity and peace.
2. Our journey with FAO's Regional Office began last year where we initiated together a dialogue with the private sector in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region to identify opportunities for private sector engagement and action around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and SDG #2 in particular. The Director-General of FAO was present and delivered the opening speech. I can assure you that the first private sector dialogue hosted by the Regional Office for the NENA Region in collaboration with ICD and IsDB Group Business Forum "THIQAHA" received high marks within the community.
3. In testimony to the above, we agreed as a team to review and report on the findings and recommendations of the Conference and we held our own independent consultations on February 3rd, with the following main findings and recommendations:
 - The private Sector and FAO should share a common understanding of the challenges faced by agri-food systems in the region;
 - Work closely to achieve the four priorities identified by FAO for the region and how can the private sector contribute to addressing them;
 - Identify bottlenecks and constraints to better engagement of the private sector in agri-food systems to achieve the SDGs, and possible ways to overcome them;
 - Discussing possible elements of a road map for Public-Private-Partnership action in the region.
4. The consultation aimed at developing a conversation with three main categories of private sector operators:
 - a) Micro-, small and medium-sized agri-food enterprises (MSMEs), including start-ups, who can play a critical role in achieving food security and eradicating rural poverty, with special emphasis on digital agriculture and youth-and women-led businesses.
 - b) Large firms, including large national and multinational companies and State-owned enterprises operating in the agri-food sector, including production, processing, distribution, and retail;
 - c) Financial institutions, including commercial banks and private investors, impact investors and other private investment institutions who have the potential to play a critical role in mobilizing private investment to achieve the SDGs.
5. We also praised FAO's Hand in Hand initiative, which can provide a solid framework to achieve meaningful collective impact on the ground.

6. Through this initiative, FAO with the private sector should seek to provide matchmaking partnerships with donor countries, development banks, and others to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development.
7. ICD's financial institutions partners in North Africa (Al Akhdar Bank in Morocco, Wifack Bank in Tunisia, Islamic Bank of Mauritania and Enmaa Leasing Company in Egypt) and ICD want to restate that the private sector is a driving force of boosting markets, consumers and farmers. An enhanced engagement of the private sector can provide capacity development, investments and a new professional market-oriented business model.
8. Another very critical area that needs to be developed is the Private-public sector partnership, which should focus on the following:
 - Improving knowledge and education on food practices;
 - Ensure inclusive access to education, technology, funding, dialogue and support (targeting smallholders);
 - Innovation and technology to be tailored for different purposes and audience, build on circularity within food system;
 - Strengthen risk management mechanisms; and
 - Increase investment in agri-food sector.
9. So we asked: What can FAO do to improve private sector engagement?
 - FAO can act as a facilitator between private and public sector; clarify roles and shared goals;
 - Understand shared opportunities and priorities for specific collaborations;
 - Build on the comparative advantage of FAO and the private sector through defined partnerships such as South South and Triangular Cooperation and referencing the IsDB Goup's Reverse Linkages experiences in FAO's future work in the region.
 - Continuous work to streamline how engagement can be done; and
 - Build on replication and scalability; work on a model at country level and use the experience to catalyze implementation in other countries;
10. In conclusion, and on behalf of the Region's Private Sector voice, we see FAO as a catalyst in transforming the world's agri-food systems, the way we produce, process, distribute and consume food, as one of the key avenues to achieving many targets of the 2030 Agenda. I am proud to state that ICD has also made significant steps in the development of the agriculture sector and today we remain committed to several sector-building initiatives. At ICD, we are also actively contributing to the development of the agriculture sector by financing infrastructure and PPP projects related to this vital sector.
11. We are confident that together, and hand-in-hand, we can achieve the noble mission of eradicating hunger, eliminating poverty and ensuring that no one is left behind, through **Better** production, **Better** nutrition, a **Better** environment and a **Better** life.
12. I wish you all a very successful Conference and I look forward to being with you in person next time.