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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

**Thirty-seventh Session**

**Colombo, Sri Lanka,  
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**Statement by the Director-General**

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*Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am very pleased to be here with you today at the opening of the Ministerial Session of the FAO Regional Ministerial Conference for Asia and the Pacific. This session presents a new broader format, over four days, allowing for more interaction among FAO Members in the region.
2. It is an important platform for you as policy makers to share ideas and good experiences with your peers from other countries in the Asia Pacific Region, and beyond, and will provide the impetus to move more aggressively towards the agrifood systems transformation that this region – and the world – needs.
3. Now is the time to make that transformation happen!
4. After years of pandemic and the related shocks and setbacks to our agrifood systems, the world, and this region are recovering and rebuilding. Especially Sri Lanka from whom we can learn many important experiences for overcoming the many socio-economic challenges and recovering and rebuilding successfully, with the support of FAO.
5. I am pleased to say that Sri Lanka has followed the “Four Rs V1.0” approach that we are following at FAO, and I look forward to coming back to this country before the end of my term to celebrate your successes with you.
6. At FAO, we are following the approach of the “Four Rs V1.0”:
  - Recovery from the pandemic and broken facilities – after restructuring of headquarters, and the Regional and Subregional Offices, this year we have started to focus on the Country Offices;
  - Reform of our systems and management to be fit for purpose and mandate;
  - Rebuild FAO’s network and comprehensive capacity – this is FAO’s real comparative advantage: the network and the platform we provide for Members; and
  - A Renaissance of FAO for a better future – this is our collective, ultimate goal, together.
7. You are now well-familiar with FAO’s Strategic Framework 2022-31, which guides our work through the aspiration of the Four Betters: Better Production, Better Nutrition, a Better Environment, and a Better Life – leaving no one behind.
8. I am happy to see how Sri Lanka is implementing the Four Betters.
9. Leaving no one behind is the main goal of the SDGs and we need the Four Betters to achieve these goals.
10. To achieve this, my focus is on strengthening FAO’s country offices to maximize their impact on the ground and support the work of the Members at the country level.
11. After almost 80 years, FAO is receiving increased funding from donors who in turn require from us accountability, efficiency, and deliverables – for which we need a systematic approach. For this reason, I started the reform of headquarters, followed by the Regional and Subregional Offices, and now the Country Offices.
12. I wanted to give you a logical picture of what I wanted to do, what I’ve done and what I am going to do – so that you can understand me clearly and see that I am fully transparent.
13. To speed up and scale up tangible and accountable results on the ground, I convened a historic global working meeting of all FAO Representatives (FAORs) in Rome in December last year. This was important because the FAORs are our network focal points – Members, partners look at FAO first through our FAORs, and the role they play in the countries. And we are planning the second global meeting in Bangkok in December this year – from Rome we are moving out to the regions!

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*Dear Colleagues,*

14. To reform this region's agrifood systems will require inter-ministerial efforts across all branches of government, as well as the private sector, research institutes, academia, and civil society – at all levels from the top to the grass roots.
15. I always say that the ministers responsible for agriculture are our window ministries because through them we reach out to other relevant ministries, local government, private sector entities and all partners.
16. For this reason, this Regional Ministerial Conferences has reached and consulted all partners. We need to all work together in an efficient, effective, and coherent manner – coherency is key to reach out collective goal, all working in the same direction to ensure we reach the same destination.
17. The ongoing global challenges have cast a shadow over the Organization's work, but the new, reformed and more fit-for-purpose FAO is ready to respond to the needs of Members.
18. We are ready to do more and better, together!
19. We must be smart about mobilizing resources efficiently and adapting to the changing situations on the ground across this very vast region, while remaining tailor-made to the specific needs of individual countries and areas.
20. During my discussion with the President of Sri Lanka this morning, we discussed how over the past two years through funding from USAID – which was not a large amount for them, but with which Sri Lanka managed to reach almost 2 million farmers with adequate and cheap fertilizer.
21. So, I urge all our donors to change their business model. Remember a friend in need in a friend indeed!
22. For the past two years, FAO has been able to deliver successfully because we have the support of strong donors, at the right time and in the right manner.
23. In my re-election manifesto I pledged to work on five key objectives:
  - One: to further increase resource mobilization.
  - Two: to fully leverage FAO's potential and advancing innovation-driven transformation - including the establishment of a global food and agriculture museum and network. This will be a truly historic legacy, not only for the Asia Pacific Region, but for all countries. On the one hand you can promote traditional agriculture, and on the other you can promote the latest technologies.
  - Three: to ensure the World Food Forum continues to assist the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, promote science and innovation, and mobilize the world's youth as agents of change for the transformation of global agrifood systems. For this reason, I appreciated that Members supported the establishment of the new Office for Youth and Women – this is part of the systematic change I am implementing. In particular, I wish to thank all the Members of this region for their full support.
  - Four: to strengthen FAO's capacity and capability to serve Members and the farmers of the world by strengthening the Country Offices.
  - Five: to improve FAO's human resources development to attract talent from all corners of the world. I urge good applicants from this region to apply because many countries from this region are currently under-represented – I need you to join FAO and work together with us towards our common mission!
24. During my visit to the Regional Office in Bangkok in early January this year, we discussed ways to strengthen our efforts at delivering for our Members in Asia and the Pacific. For example, I emphasized FAO's comparative advantage in helping Members in the region with increased production, such as in aquaculture.

25. We have just celebrated the Chinese New Year during which we always wish for a surplus, and this is why fish is so important because fish, and rice, are so important for so many cultures in this region.
26. We are also undertaking a feasibility study across all the Pacific Island States on how to increase production, and we will report back to the FAO Council in December this year. We will do the same with the Caribbean Region and then in Africa.
27. This is part of the follow-up action from the SIDS Conference we hosted in 2023. It's about real international UN solidarity – we hear so much about solidarity, but we should have more solidarity action. After the coming of the UN SIDS Summit. This is why I established the FAO Office for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs four years ago – this is real action!
28. At the same time, we are continuing to scale up South-South and Triangular Cooperation and expand partnerships and strategic alliances such as the Hand in Hand Initiative, including with International Financial Institutions, the private sector, regional institutional bodies, civil society, and others.
29. The objective is to bridge investment and financing gaps to ensure that financing reaches those who need it most, especially smallholder and family farmers.
30. We need to speed up the modernization of the agriculture sector – I also discussed this with the President of Sri Lanka earlier today.
31. The Asia Pacific region holds great potential to lead the world in many areas, notwithstanding the many challenges. The region is now home to three of the world's five largest economies, and over the past 20 years the economies of many nations in this region have been moving out of the category of 'least developed' and graduated into a 'middle income' status. After this graduation, the priorities need to change. You need to completely change the business model of agrifood systems development.
32. While hunger and under-nourishment remain prevalent in some countries, many countries in this region help to feed much of the rest of the world, with the majority of aquaculture, rice production and the rapidly growing protein sector found here.
33. But we need to do even more, with less.
34. We need to think innovatively, be action-oriented, and results-targeted to make the changes needed to accelerate national and global pathways towards achieving more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient, and more sustainable agrifood systems. We need the four MOREs!
35. Sustainability is a goal, but we need a pathway to reach this. A farmer needs to produce more with less, less land, less water – this is efficiency. You need more inclusivity – to ensure an equitable sharing of economic development for all. More resilience means more investment in agrifood systems infrastructure.
36. These are the real game changers for the Four Betters and the cross-cutting catalysts for implementing the FAO Strategic Framework over the next decade.
37. I really believe that this region can be the “Agent of Change” the world needs to help all countries globally accelerate their efforts to reach, and even surpass, the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
38. With strong political will and commitment, and with enabling policies, sufficient investment and innovative business models, this region can lead the change and inspire the world.
39. As ‘One FAO’ working at global, regional, and country level, we are here to facilitate the change – working alongside you.
40. I wish you a fruitful Ministerial Conference here in beautiful Sri Lanka, leading to effective guidance to lead FAO's work in the Asia Pacific Region.
41. Your contribution will create the FAO initiatives, policies, and recommendations, for your ownership and implementation on the ground.

42. I especially want to thank the Chairperson of the Conference for all your efforts to make this conference so impactful. You are our friend, and we will support you in your mission!
43. Thank you.