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منظمة الأغذية
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Продовольственная и
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Organización
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Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

THIRTIETH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Khartoum, the Republic of the Sudan, 4-8 December 2010

Statement by the Director-General of FAO

*Mr. President,
Mr. Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Introduction

It is a great pleasure and an honour for me to be with you on the occasion of the Thirtieth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, which is taking place in this historic city of Khartoum, the Republic of the Sudan. Allow me to start by expressing on behalf of the Organization, its personnel and all the participants, our profound gratitude to the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Omar Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir and his Government, as well as to the Sudanese people for their hospitality and warm welcome.

This Regional Conference is being held again in Khartoum after 43 years when it was first held here in 1967. The Sudan, the largest country in Africa, has realized over the past years significant strides in the spheres of socio-economic development. The country is also participating actively in the regional political and economic affiliations; including: the African Union, the League of Arab States, COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa), the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and others.

State of Food Insecurity in the World and the Region

*Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

In 1996, the first World Food Summit convened in Rome and pledged to half hunger by 2015 and achieve lasting food security for all. Such high-level commitment was reaffirmed by further global agreements, notably the Millennium Summit in 2000 and the World Food Summit: *five years later* in 2002. In order to review our achievements, FAO called for another World Summit on Food Security in November 2009 in Rome, when it was decided to completely eradicate hunger from the world.

According to FAO's report *The State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) 2010*, published last October, there are presently 925 million people suffering hunger and malnutrition in the world. While this represents a welcome decline of nearly 10 percent from the 2009 level, it

remains unacceptably high. This decline is largely due to improved economic growth foreseen in 2010, particularly in the developing countries, and the fall in international food prices since mid-2008.

In addition, today 100 countries require emergency assistance to rebuild their agricultural productive capacity and there are 30 in a situation of food crisis. As a consequence, the level of the FAO emergency assistance programme in these countries amounts to 1.1 billion US dollars, involving 2000 experts and technicians.

The situation in member countries of the Near East Region mirrors the world situation, with more people suffering from hunger and malnutrition. The number of hungry and undernourished people in the region in 2010 is estimated at 37 million. This represents an increase of 17 million people relative to the base period of the 1996 World Food Summit. Nevertheless, it corresponds to a reduction of 5 million people from the 2009 level.

Huge disparities exist among the Near East countries in terms of the level and prevalence of undernourishment and in the progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. The conflict zones in the Region, notably Afghanistan, Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Iraq, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen are source of serious concern.

Agricultural Production in the Region

In 2008/09, cereal production for the Region as a whole stood at 160 million tonnes, which is 5 percent less than in 2006/07. As a result, food imports increased by 11.5 percent during the same period, from 61 million tonnes to 68 million tonnes. Severe droughts and unheralded heat stresses, which hit several countries in the Region in 2008/09, were the main factors behind the drop in cereal production. A better improvement was recorded in the livestock sector, where meat production increased by 5 percent between 2006/07 and 2008/09.

Fishery and aquaculture production is assuming an increasing importance given the rich marine and freshwater biodiversity in the Region, but its pace of growth remains modest. Total capture fisheries and aquaculture production amounted to five million tonnes in 2008, with aquaculture accounting for more the 24 percent.

While the Region is regarded as low forest cover compared to the rest of the world, the forest sector contributes more than 7 billion US dollars to the regional gross domestic product. The effects of climate change on the natural ecosystems are contributing to the degradation of forests and rangelands and to faster desertification in the Region.

Main Challenges and Priorities for the Future – the Region within the Global Context

Agricultural production will need to increase by 70 percent in the world and to double in the developing countries in order to feed a global population expected to reach 9.1 billion in 2050. Almost all of this demographic growth will take place in developing countries, and primarily in urban zones. Moreover, the increasing volatility of agricultural commodity prices is becoming a major problem that requires special attention. Also, there is the impact of climate change on agricultural production.

Strong political will and adequate financial resources will be needed if we are to rise to the challenge of banishing hunger from the world. Decision taken must be followed by actions commensurate with the goals set.

Agricultural production and productivity need to be increased in developing countries, and particularly in low-income food-deficit countries, and to strengthen the resilience of their production systems by boosting investment in rural infrastructure – water schemes, rural roads, storage facilities, cold chains, slaughterhouses, communication networks and so forth, but also by using modern factors of production.

Official development assistance to agriculture should reach 44 billion US dollars per year and developing countries must themselves devote a greater portion of their budgets to the sector. The share of agriculture in public expenditures in low-income food-deficit countries must be brought to at least 10 percent.

The Near East Region is characterized by a mosaic of very different countries in terms of resources and socio-economic conditions. The total area covered by the 30 countries of the Region is vast and is spread on widely diverse land and water resources. Moreover, several countries in the Region have the largest fossil fuel reserves in the world. The Region is home to 10 percent of the world population, accounts for 6 percent of the world agricultural labor force and, in 2008, contributed about 5 percent of the world GDP.

The three major challenges to attain food security in the Region are: (i) limited water and land resources; (ii) rapid population growth; and (iii) heavy dependence on food imports. Per capita availability of renewable water resources in the Region is currently around 1,050 cubic meter per year, compared to a global annual average of 8,900 cubic meter per person, and it is projected to drop by half by the year 2050.

While agricultural yields have improved in some countries, overall regional productivity lags behind other regions. On average, cereal yields in the Region are currently about half the world average, and the gap is widening. It is projected that the deficit in cereals will more than double between 2000 and 2030. This growing food deficit makes the majority of the Near East countries more dependent on imports and, therefore, vulnerable to shocks in international and domestic markets.

It is vital to boost investment in agriculture to increase productivity. Contrary to the period between the 1970s and 1980s, public expenditures on agriculture in the Region have been very low in the past few years, particularly in relation to the contribution of agriculture to GDP. While the share of agriculture in GDP is about 12 percent for the Region, its share national public expenditures does not exceed 5 percent. In recent years, the Region has seen an increase in intra-regional investments in agriculture which are growing amidst the global financial crisis and the expected lower levels of foreign direct investment.

The prevailing conditions in the Region look more encouraging for economic cooperation and investment compared with the second half of the 20th Century. Increased intra-regional cooperation, through increased trade and investment, continues to generate a great interest in the Near East.

Agenda of the Regional Conference

*Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

During this thirtieth session of the Regional Conference, you will be informed of FAO's activities in the Region and you will have an opportunity to discuss implementation of the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) for FAO renewal, establishment of the network of decentralized offices and reform of the Committee on World Food Security. The Conference will also offer the opportunity to review and debate the draft Regional Priority Framework which represents the outcome of a wider consultation between FAO and your countries during the last two years. The document identifies regional priority areas of action for achieving Goals and Strategic Objectives under the Strategic Framework in the Region

FAO Reform

FAO is currently undergoing the most profound process of reform within the United Nations system. It is renovating the Organization's work procedures and the way it executes its mandate and delivers its services to Member Nations.

Implementation of the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) has been a primary objective for both Member Nations and the Secretariat since its adoption by the FAO Conference in November 2008. The main actions of the IPA concern mainly the following elements: the adoption of a planning framework and a new results-based approach; decentralization and a greater delegation of authority; organizational streamlining; improvement of human resource management; and a more effective governance system.

Since last January, the Regional Offices have assumed the responsibility of overseeing the programme and budget of technical activities in the Region and are progressively taking over the technical work of the country offices. In addition, staff in the Regional Offices have been trained to take over responsibility for activities conducted under the Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP).

A comprehensive restructuring of FAO headquarters was initiated in 2009 to align the Organization's administrative structure with the objectives of the results-based framework and will be completed in 2012. One of its key elements has been the elimination of 40 Director-level positions to lighten the structure and hierarchy of the Organization.

The Independent Chairperson of the Council will explain in greater details the nature of the ongoing activities, especially those undertaken by the Representatives of Member Nations.

Reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

Last November, the thirty-sixth session of the FAO Conference approved another major reform: that of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The purpose of CFS reform is to improve the governance of world food security, using existing structures and programmes and creating effective partnerships. Thus the CFS becomes a true international and intergovernmental body for the fight against hunger.

The CFS, under its renovated framework, held its first session in October 2010. The session was characterized by a new spirit of openness and focused on tangible results. The CFS now comprises a high-level panel of experts, which will allow members to take the proper decisions based on objective and impartial scientific studies and analyses.

At country level and under the authority of governments, it is essential to establish partnerships, building upon thematic groups and national alliances for food security. This should provide support to the national authorities responsible for ensuring a rational allocation and utilization of budgetary resources, official development assistance and direct domestic and foreign private investment. Thus, the new Committee on World Food Security

and its High-Level Panel of Experts, together with the relevant national mechanisms, will be the cornerstone of the Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security.

Conclusion

*Mr. Chairperson,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Only five years separate us from 2015, the date by which the world's leaders have pledged to halve hunger and extreme poverty. However, if past trends continue, that target may be missed. But I am convinced that together, we can eliminate hunger from our planet. For this goal to become reality, we must move from words to action, and we must do it quickly.

During the last 15 years, several countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have succeeded to significantly reduce the number of hungry people on their countries. This means that we know what should be done to defeat hunger. To achieve our objectives, it will be necessary to embark on policy and institutional reforms, to bolster existing capacities and to redirect investment towards agricultural development and food security.

In an increasingly inter-dependent world, the promotion of regional cooperation becomes crucial if we are to address the cross-border issues that impact on food security, to enhance intra-regional trade and investment, and to reach consensus on the policies needed to ensure sustainable agricultural development. I am encouraged by the many initiatives led by the Gulf Co-operation Council, the Islamic Development Bank, the Social and Economic Development Fund, the League of Arab States, CEN-SAD, IGAD, which are active in the Region. FAO wishes to further strengthen its already excellent collaboration with the regional and subregional organizations in order to achieve our common goals and objectives. I sincerely hope that we can continue to work along the same lines. Together we can win the battle against world hunger, a battle that nobody can afford to lose.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you every success in your work.

Assalamou Alaikoum wa Rahmatou Allah.