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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Thirty-third Session

Santiago, Chile, 6 - 9 May 2014

Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

*Chairman,
Excellencies,
Director-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Distinguished Delegates, it is a privilege for me to participate in this 33rd Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean, and to speak to you on some of the major issues that impact on the work of our Organization at the start of the 2014-2015 biennium.

At the outset allow me to convey appreciation to you, Mr Chairperson, and through you to your Government and to the people of Chile, for the hospitality provided to all participants of this regional conference in the beautiful city of Santiago.

This being my first time to address the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Conference since I was elected as the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council by the FAO Conference in June last year, I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation for the confidence you have placed in me.

I have taken up this position with great dedication, and I am committed to steering the Council towards more focused and effective deliberations, engaging with Members and FAO Management on key issues, in order to find the common ground and move together in a spirit of reciprocal trust and consensus building - as exemplified by the recent preparations and launch of the intergovernmental process for the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), the Independent Review of Governance Reform and in other informal consultative meetings I have had with Members.

Members' interest, sense of ownership and involvement in the work of FAO is greater than ever as the Organization tackles the increasingly complex and persistent challenges of extreme poverty, food insecurity, hunger, malnutrition and environmental threats which continue to plague the region, against a background of global resource limitations.

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Mr Chairman, I have been in office now for almost eleven months, and during this time I have had many opportunities to witness the renewed commitment of Members, not least during the reformulation of the Organization's Strategic Objectives, followed up by the transformational changes process initiated by Dr Graziano, the Director-General of FAO. Another unprecedented positive development came from the FAO Staff Bodies in their statement to the December 2013 session of the Council by committing themselves to achieve the challenging goals of the Organization. It is a renewed FAO and we all have the duty to support and sustain the new momentum.

The renewed Strategic Framework and Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) for 2014-2015 also reflect the regional priorities formulated by you at the Regional Conference held two years ago, such as the Programmatic Regional Initiative under Strategic Objective One: 2025 Hunger Free Latin America and the Caribbean, which is supported through the FAO Hunger Free Latin America and the Caribbean Support Project.

The implementation of the PWB for 2014-2015 began in January 2014, after the December 2013 session of Council had endorsed adjustments to the PWB, in accordance with the decision and guidance of the 38th Session of the FAO Conference in June 2013.

Implementation will require dedicated and concerted efforts both by FAO staff, at all levels, and the Members. At the same time, planning has to start this year for the 2016-17 biennium. Hence the need for inputs and guidance from Technical Committees and Regional Conferences, in keeping with their role as FAO Governing Bodies.

That said, I should also mention how encouraged I am to see progress in the way Regional Conference guidance is reported back to the Council and Conference. This is still work in progress, but I believe we are on track as I have seen that the way regional perspectives are taken into consideration and followed up during the inter-sessional period is encouraging and continues to be fine-tuned. Of course, much depends on the clarity of the guidance contained in the Report from this session which you will be submitting both to the June 2014 session of Council on programme priorities and to the 2015 session of Conference on policy and regulatory matters.

The Report of the Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean will inform the FAO Conference and Council on the outcome of your discussions, which over the course of this session will focus on the key challenge of meeting needs of growing populations in the context of increasingly scarce natural resources and the challenges of climate change.

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, the *Report of the Independent External Evaluation of FAO* in 2007 highlighted governance as central to a strengthened FAO, if the Organization is to meet the expectations of its Members. As you know, the follow-up *Immediate Plan of Action for FAO Renewal*, driven by the Members, was subsequently implemented from 2010 to 2013.

You may also recall that the *Immediate Plan of Action* envisaged a comprehensive review of progress on governance reforms and their effectiveness after a six year period. So, in December 2013 the Council endorsed arrangements for an Independent Review of Governance Reform, as well as the appointment of Ms Maxine Olson and Ms Nadia Hijab to the review team for this exercise.

The review team is interacting with Members at selected Governing Body sessions to seek views on progress made so far, what remains to be done, and what could be done differently to further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of FAO's Governing Bodies. The outcome of its review will serve as input to the discussion and assessment of governance reforms by the Conference in June 2015.

Ms Maxine Olson, Review Team member, is present at this Regional Conference and will be interfacing with as many of you as possible this week to seek your views on progress made so far in the implementation of Governance Reform.

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, as you are aware and as was mentioned by Dr Graziano this year FAO, together with the World Health Organization, will convene the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) from 19 to 21 November at FAO Headquarters.

The preparations for this important event are in progress. I would like to add my voice that your interest, engagement and support during the preparations as well as your presence and active participation at Conference will help mobilize the levels of international cooperation needed for more effective action to end malnutrition.

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, the Latin America and Caribbean Region has demonstrated its renewed commitment to agriculture and to the fight against hunger. Your region has made an exemplary and great advance in the fight against hunger in the past two decades: as already mentioned by Dr Graziano as well as by CELAC Social Area Coordinator, I recognize that some countries in the region¹ have managed to eradicate hunger by having achieved the goal of reducing by 2012 the number of undernourished set at the World Food Summit (WFS) in 1996; while some countries have already achieved the Millennium Development Goal Number 1 (MDG1) hunger target of reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. I congratulate you for these remarkable achievements.

Mr Chairman, I firmly believe that the continuing engagement and commitment of the governments in the Latin America and the Caribbean in the challenging issues of agriculture, food and nutrition security will do much to ensure that FAO continues to serve you well, and to be an effective agent in the struggle to free the world of hunger and malnutrition.

Thank you.

¹ Cuba, Guyana, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela, Chile (based on SOFI 2012)