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THIRTY-THIRD FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Santiago, Chile, 6 to 9 May 2014

**Statement by the Chairperson of the 32nd Session of the Regional
Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean**

Esteemed Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Chile and Chair of the thirty-third FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean, Ingeniero Carlos Furche Guajardo,

Esteemed Director-General of the FAO, Professor José Graziano Da Silva,

Esteemed Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, Mr Wilfred Ngirwa,

Esteemed Secretary of this Regional Conference, Doctor Tito Díaz,

Esteemed FAO Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean, Doctor Raúl Benítez,

Honourable Ministers of Agriculture of Latin America and the Caribbean,

Distinguished members of the diplomatic corps,

Esteemed members of civil society organizations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to share with you the thirty-third Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean and wish to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Chile for its hospitality and efficient organization of such an important event for our region. Minister Furche, Argentina is confident of the success of this meeting and Chile's two-year presidency of this Regional Conference. You may count on our country's wholehearted commitment and support.

I also wish to commend the work of FAO officials and experts, led by their Director-General, Professor Graziano Da Silva, to whom we extend special thanks. Mr Raúl Benítez, FAO Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean, has made a major contribution both in his day-to-day work and in organizing this Regional Conference. As we know from experience that such events are impossible to organize without the commitment of FAO, we should like to add our words of praise and thanks to those the Organization has already received over the past few days.

Esteemed colleagues, as you know, the Regional Conferences are FAO's highest governing body and forum in the region. They meet to define the vision, priorities, challenges and strategies for the Organization's activities in the region and to formulate common positions on policy and regulatory

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issues worldwide. I am told that some intense and fruitful work has been achieved over the past two days, so we are fully confident that the conference will be concluded successfully on Friday, once again demonstrating to society that Latin America and the Caribbean are absolutely committed to achieving FAO's strategic objectives and to improving the region's positioning in an increasingly complex international environment.

Ministers, as you know, Argentina had the honour of chairing the thirty-second Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean. In our capacity as outgoing Chair, we are here today to comply with the mandate entrusted to us by FAO: to inform this Regional Conference of the main outcomes for the region over the past two years, in particular those of the 144th session of the FAO Council in June 2012 and the 38th Session of the FAO Conference in June 2013.

Argentina believes that the Regional Conferences represent a valuable opportunity to assess progress towards achieving our goals.

The thirty-second Regional Conference endorsed four regional priorities that have guided FAO's work over the 2012–2013 biennium: food and nutrition security; family farming and rural development; climate change and environmental sustainability; and plant and animal health and food safety. The FAO Conference in Rome and the FAO Council endorsed these priorities, along with the Multiyear Programme of Work.

I wish to start by discussing progress in meeting the biggest challenge we face today: food security. We welcome the great strides made by the region in fighting hunger among its population. We reduced the proportion of undernourished people from 14.7% in the 1990-1992 period to 7.9% in 2011–2013. In addition, 16 of the 33 countries in the region have halved the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, meeting the United Nations target set in the Millennium Development Goals ahead of the deadline.

We believe that this progress has been inextricably tied to poverty reduction in the region over the past decade, resulting from a virtuous circle of: (i) active state policies to foster sustained growth, with social inclusion and higher incomes for the most vulnerable population sectors, and (ii) a significant increase in South-South cooperation in the agricultural sector.

However, 47 million of our compatriots in Latin America and the Caribbean still suffer from hunger, which is simply unacceptable. We must therefore redouble our political commitment to taking continued positive steps to eradicate this scourge from the region once and for all. Tackling hunger was therefore made a presidential priority of the second summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States held recently in Havana. On that occasion, The Heads of State and Government reiterated the highest political commitment to implementing the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative.

A large proportion of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, making this a key sector for the region's economic and social development. The farming sector is facing ever more challenges, including: access to new technologies to increase agricultural productivity; a proliferation of trade-distorting measures; climate change; growing competition for natural resource access and use; and changing consumption and marketing patterns.

In the current International Year of Family Farming, we wish to make special mention of a phrase reiterated by FAO Director-General, Professor Graziano Da Silva, on a number of occasions: that without family farming there would be no food security. Growth in family farming would increase food production and contribute to a more healthy and varied diet, while driving development and fighting poverty. That is why we stress the importance of FAO's activities to reassess family farming in the context of this conference.

I wish to refer briefly to the 144th session of the FAO Council. On that occasion, Argentina, in its capacity as Chair of the Regional Conference, presented the priorities agreed at the Buenos Aires meeting and asked for them to be included in the FAO Programme of Work. As you know, both were duly approved by the FAO Council.

The meeting also gave us an opportunity to put forward some of the major issues of consensus arrived at two years earlier. The region is convinced that a key component of the solution to the scourge of hunger is to produce more food for more people, and that some of the main measures required are to: (i) boost productive investment in agriculture, (ii) address the specific challenges of family farming; and (iii) increase international cooperation to adapt agriculture to climate change. We also agree on the importance of: increasing agricultural production and productivity sustainably based on innovation and technology transfer; strengthening international cooperation; and enhancing the transparency of international markets.

I also wish to report that the 38th session of the FAO Conference supported a number of initiatives that we consider to be especially important for the region.

First, countries supported the establishment of the Global Soil Partnership, as a voluntary initiative to improve the governance of this heterogeneous, limited and strategic resource. The partnership is designed to ensure that soils are kept healthy and productive, as they form the basis for agricultural development and, ultimately, for global food security. This initiative takes on special relevance if we consider that 46% of the world's land is already degraded.

Second, the Conference stressed the need to reach a balanced conclusion of the Doha Round trade negotiations in the World Trade Organization. This is extremely important because international trade in agricultural products continues to be heavily distorted by the protectionist policies of developed countries, preventing many countries in the region from realizing their full productive potential. We reiterate that the best contribution international trade could make to food security is by implementing the Doha mandate.

Lastly, the Conference recognized the Organization's work on the ongoing negotiations on Voluntary Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment. According to FAO statistics and estimates, to meet the growing demand for food by 2050, an annual net investment in developing countries of 8.3 billion dollars is required. We believe that, in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment would be a useful tool for promoting: the establishment of productive investments that encourage value added at source; the development of regional economies; access to new technologies; and the industrialization of rural areas.

Esteemed Ministers and colleagues, I have attempted to report on the progress we have made as a region, as well as on the challenges we still face. We believe that these premises remain fully applicable as strategic guidelines for policy-making to enable us to eradicate the scourge of hunger and lay solid foundations for genuine and inclusive sustainable development.

Minister Furche, Director-General Graziano Da Silva, esteemed colleagues,

I do not intend to speak at greater length. Two days of intense work lie before us, which I am certain will be highly productive. May I reiterate my best wishes for the success of this Regional Conference, in the hope that we can send a clear message to the world that Latin America and the Caribbean is working in a coordinated manner to ensure that this new millennium ushers in a more just and inclusive world, without hunger or poverty.

Thank you very much.