

Statement delivered by
His Excellency Michael Pintard
Minister for Agriculture and Marine Resources of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas
on the occasion of the
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Greetings from the sunny isles of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas and on behalf of the Government and people of the Bahamas, we look forward to a continued partnership with FAO and the strengthening of work towards the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030.

The theme for this 42nd Conference, *Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action*, is most timely as we must continue to act with the utmost urgency of sustained and meaningful action at all levels to progress accelerators behind the strategies.

Since 2019 the Bahamas experienced two food crises in the agri-food system. The first followed the devastation caused by Hurricane Dorian, the worst hurricane experience in our lifetime that devastated our country physically and resulted in taking two of the three most important economic centres offline in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. Two of the most important areas of development were adversely affected by the hurricane and we saw it combine more than USD 3.4 billion impact on our overall economy.

This was followed a few months later by food issues and these food issues were exacerbated due to a global health pandemic, which we are still experiencing. That exacted, similarly, more than USD 3.4 billion impact on our overall economy, and in particular adversely affected our food systems. In both situations the country's food and agriculture sector were placed in an unfortunate state and we had to respond to the gaps that both of these crises revealed in our food systems.

We would like to applaud FAO for providing immediate responses to aid during these difficult times, notably the swift response in terms of helping us to assess the impact of Hurricane Dorian and, similarly, FAO assisted us in the midst of the pandemic. We had a number of missions that were dispatched to assist us and as a result we strengthened the strategic plan that we were already working on as a result of FAO and other multilateral interventions.

The assistance in particular concentrated on technical projects to rebuild rural livelihoods and, as of recent, the inclusion in the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, which will strengthen agri-business to become resilient. However, as we chart the pathway to transforming the agri-food system, the Bahamas is committed to proactively taking an interdisciplinary and holistic approach to better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better livelihood. Similar to other Small Island Developing States. in the Bahamas we like to refer to ourselves as a "Big Ocean State".

The Bahamas recognize that it has limitations in terms of human resources. Therefore, systematic approaches guided by management practices, such as agroecology and integrated agriculture, are key to navigating through the complexities of the food systems. Moreover, ensuring that governing measures are inclusive of private sector stakeholder inputs, developed to reduce the uncertainties of the agri-food environment, and also to manage risk and to prepare for any emergencies that may arise.

The Government of the Bahamas is in support of the UN Food Systems Summit and has engaged in a series of food systems dialogue within our country. These dialogues have allowed us to listen to the

voices of less heard persons who, we believe, can contribute to transforming our sector and conclude several transformative outcomes that can be game-changing solutions for the Bahamas food system.

It is worth mentioning that such game-changing agents are aligned with the FAO crosscutting accelerators, that is the need for technology, research, innovation and finance. As we seek to further engage women and youth in agriculture and marine sciences to improve the sector, we acknowledge the role of big data collection, biotechnologies, the potential of digital tools such as blockchain for traceability of agro products, digitalization of advisory services and the importance of geospatial mapping for the research to improve production systems to become sustainable and resilient.

Increased investment, we believe, will catapult the bohemian food system by stimulating job creation in the green and blue economy, thereby strengthening the agri-businesses, encouraging new entrants to the sector, revitalizing the value chain and supporting its mechanisms to facilitate the increase in local food production and value-added products available in the market.

In closing, I would like to thank the technical staff of FAO for the assistance with past and ongoing projects. The Government and people of Italy for hosting this Conference. We look forward to the continued collaboration in supporting smallholder farmers and fisherfolks in the development of our agriculture and marine industries.

Thank you very much.