

Statement delivered by
His Excellency Kestutis Navickas,
Minister for Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania
on the occasion of the 43rd Session of the FAO Conference (1-7 July 2023)
5 July 2023

Mr Chair,
Director-General,
Distinguish Delegates and All Participants of the Conference,
It is a great honour to speak on behalf of Lithuania.

Thank you for bringing the water issue into our discussions.

When talking about the state of food and agriculture, it is difficult not to focus only on the multitude and overlapping crises. In Lithuania, we have seen a moderate progress in SDG 2¹, but more efforts are still needed especially in accelerating the transition to sustainable agriculture and mitigating the effects of the recent rapid increase of food prices on the most vulnerable.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement delivered by Spain on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member States.

The unprovoked and illegal war of aggression of Russia in Ukraine continues to strain the global food security. The aggressor is not only directly killing innocent civilians but is also targeting the primary needs of the Ukrainians. At first, it was the demolition of the energy infrastructure in order to freeze the people of Ukraine and leave them without drinking water. Now we have the explosion of Kakhovka dam, which caused flooding of residential areas, drowned cattle on farms, washed away crops. This brutal act will negatively impact agricultural sector because the dam was used as a water reservoir for field irrigation. Therefore, the destruction by Russia of the Kakhovka dam stands as one of the most devastating examples, with its negative effects to impact local communities, agriculture, natural ecosystems and water resources for years to come.

Ukraine holds a significant position as one of the world's primary agricultural producers, cultivating crops such as wheat, barley, maize, rapeseed and sunflower seeds. Countries in Africa and Asia heavily rely on these exports. As the extensive areas of agricultural land were flooded, we can expect to see knock-on effects in terms of food production. The broader context is deeply concerning, as Russia persists in impeding the export of Ukrainian goods through Ukrainian ports and repeatedly threatens to end the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Continuing support for Ukraine is imperative to ensure the rebuilding and functioning of its agricultural infrastructure.

Mr. Chair,

We thank FAO for the proposal of the integrated water resources management as the next biennial theme. It is extremely timely, as we are currently experiencing climate extremes with significant effects on our agricultural production. Lithuania is fortunate to be a water-rich country, but as such, extreme events are becoming more common, it will require shifting to a more efficient water use as well as production practices more suitable to the changing climate mitigation.

Currently, however, the most prominent issue is the worsening water quality in our rivers and lakes, as well as the Baltic Sea, one of the most eutrophication-affected seas in the world. Agriculture is the leading source of this surface water pollution, mostly due to impact of nitrogen fertilisers. We are tackling this not only by proposing regulatory measures, but also providing IT tools for farmers for better planning as well as support for more sustainable practices, such as cover crops, protective strips along waterways and crop protection.

¹ Sustainable Development Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

To conclude, we would like to echo the support for FAO's work on water, in cooperation with United Nations Environment Assembly. Food systems sustainability, which also includes integrated water resources management, is key for ensuring food security and the resilience of global food systems. It is important we continue to work on this together.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.