

Statement delivered by
Her Excellency Maria do Ceu Antunes
Minister of Agriculture for Portugal
on the occasion of the 43rd Session of the FAO Conference (1-7 July 2023)
3 July 2023

Madame President,
colleagues,

Portugal is fully aligned in recognising the progress made in the fight against hunger and malnutrition but they are solely insufficient to achieve the goals and targets we have set ourselves under the Agenda 2030. Spain are speaking on behalf of us. Mr Luis Planas from Spain, as current President of the European Union, will be presenting our latest common EU position. The number of people suffering from hunger and food insecurity has been growing. The COVID-19 pandemic, the global economic slowdown and food supply difficulties resulting from the invasion of Ukraine has worsened the situation. Thus we have moved further from achieving the Sustainable Development Goal number 2 to eradicated hunger globally.

The FAO believes that the fight against world hunger is of the utmost importance and we need to transform food systems. I do congratulate the theme chosen for this Conference specifically the management of water resources which is paramount to achieving the Agenda 2030 goals and for the transformation of food production systems. In this context we understand the need to increase food production. We see that water resources in periods of drought as well, which are increasingly frequent, and also associated with periods of very intense rain means that we have to try and find a way to better have integrated water resource management, we need to see better how we use our water to reduce water pollution of the existing available water.

Now, the European Environmental Pact has meant that we are trying to find a sustainable and neutral way to develop as we move forward towards carbon neutrality in 2050 – this means that Europe is leading the transition and a process to try and move to a more efficient and competitive economy, particularly in terms of soils and land and water and this means that we will have improvements in the European agro-food system.

Portugal is aligned with the legislation for water, air and climate within the framework of European policies and objectives. Now, we are a Mediterranean country, so we are naturally more susceptible to the effects of climate change and agriculture is one of the sectors which is most affected by climate change with the recurring situations of severe and extreme drought, such as the one which is currently being felt in our country. So investment in modernisation of irrigated land management is very, very important.

We have made significant investments in existing irrigation systems whilst trying to modernise our system, trying to make sure that the farming sector is less faced with uncertainties whilst elsewhere providing the yields and making our different regions more productive and trying to also combat desertification of rural settings. The investment in new technologies and innovation when it comes to the creation of infrastructures which are essential to the development of productive activities will be decisive in trying to face these new challenges.

The importance of the issue of water resources is growing worldwide and as part of the Agenda of various international organisations. I cannot fail but to highlight the need for the management of water resources to be anchored by a model of water governance and holistic approach transversal to various levels and

sectors of decision-making and calling for the participation of a wide range of public and private actors. The need for equity and governance must be translated either at the level of the various sectoral policies – agriculture, industry, tourism, transport and energy – as well as in the context of its multiple uses in agriculture.

Food security, energy security, health and ecosystem conservation and also keeping in mind that the regions, the territories are important here. I am certain that the comprehensive knowledge of sharing and putting together strategies will contribute to overcoming difficulties. We can reach our goals which will be so important for our rural areas, for our farming systems, for producing safe, healthy and nutritional food for all.

Having comprehensive strategies will be the road to finding success in these areas, making sure that our territories and our farming sector is healthy and safe and trying to produce more healthy, more economically sustainable food. Madam, Chair, if I may conclude by saying this is a bit off the theme before us today, of water, but not taking the spotlight off sustainability, well, I would like to put on this scarf – now this scarf is the do which is given by FAO to women, women in Turkey, given to a community of women who are represented today.

We have got a representative of their group, and we have also got the Deputy Director-General, Maria Elena, here with us as well. This reflects the great importance that we all have, men and women – we've got to fight, altogether, for a more just world and where we also take into account gender equality, cross-cutting holistic and for this I would just want to salute the women farmers of the world on this occasion.

Thank you.