

NERC/04/REP
March 2004

REPORT OF THE
TWENTY-SEVENTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE
FOR THE NEAR EAST

Doha, State of Qatar, 13-17 March 2004

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAO Regional Office for the Near East

Cairo 2004

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Date and place of FAO Regional Conferences for the Near East

First	- Cairo, Egypt, 2-14 February 1948
Second	- Bloudane, Syria, 28 August - 6 September 1951
Third	- Cairo, Egypt, 1-9 September 1953
Fourth	- Damascus, Syria *, 10-20 December 1958
Fifth	- Tehran, Iran, 21 September - 1 October 1960
Sixth	- Tel Amara, Lebanon, 30 July - 8 August 1962
Seventh	- Cairo, Egypt **, 19-31 October 1964
Eighth	- Khartoum, Sudan, 24 January - 2 February 1967
Ninth	- Baghdad, Iraq, 21 September - 1 October 1968
Tenth	- Islamabad, Pakistan, 12-22 September 1970
Eleventh	- Kuwait, Kuwait, 9-19 September 1972
Twelfth	- Amman, Jordan, 31 August - 9 September 1974
Thirteenth	- Tunis, Tunisia, 4-11 October 1976
Fourteenth	- Damascus, Syria, 9-16 September 1978
Fifteenth	- Rome, Italy, 21-25 April 1981
Sixteenth	- Nicosia, Cyprus, 25-29 October 1982
Seventeenth	- Aden, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, 11-15 March 1984
Eighteenth	- Istanbul, Turkey, 17-21 March 1986
Nineteenth	- Muscat, Oman, 13-17 March 1988
Twentieth	- Tunis, Tunisia, 12-16 March 1990
Twenty-first	- Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 17-21 May 1992
Twenty-second	- Amman, Jordan, 3-6 July 1994
Twenty-third	- Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, 26-29 March 1996
Twenty-fourth	- Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, 21-25 March 1998
Twenty-fifth	- Beirut, Lebanon, 20-24 March 2000
Twenty-sixth	- Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 9-13 March 2002
Twenty-seventh	- Doha, State of Qatar, 13-17 March 2004

* Known as the United Arab Republic from 01/03/1958 to 28/09/1961.

** Known as the United Arab Republic until 02/09/1971.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
SUMMARY OF MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS	i-vii
	<u>Paragraphs</u>
I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS	
– Organization of the Conference	1
– Inaugural Ceremony	2-7
– Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur	8-10
– Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable	11
II. STATEMENTS	
– Statement by the Director-General	12-18
III. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION	
– Report on FAO Activities in the Region During 2002-2003	19-20
– Report of the Senior Officers Meeting	21
– Establishment of the Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA)	22-23
– General Debate	24-25
– NGO's / CSO's Consultation for the Near East	26
IV. OTHER MATTERS	
– Proposed List of Topics to be Considered at the 28 th Regional Conference for the Near East	27
V. CONCLUDING ITEMS	
– Date and Place of the Twenty-eighth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East	28
– Adoption of the Conference Report	29
– Closure of the Conference	30-34
APPENDICES	
A. Agenda	
B. List of Participants	
C. List of Documents	
D. Statement by the FAO Director-General	
E. Report of the Senior Officers Meeting	
F. Summary Report of the Roundtable Meeting	
G. Summary Report of the Sub-regional Strategy Meeting	

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made by the Twenty-seventh FAO Regional Conference for the Near East were as follows:

1. General Debate

1.1 For the attention of Governments

The Conference **called upon** Governments to:

- i. Review the document “Agreement for the Establishment of the Regional Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa” and forward their consent or views to the ADG/ FAO Regional Representative for the Near East.

1.2 For the attention of FAO

The Conference **requested** FAO to:

- i. Act, through its Regional Office for the Near East, as *focal point* for follow-up with interested countries towards the establishment of the Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa, as applicable in FAO rules and regulations;
- ii. Continue providing support to member countries, especially those facing major food crises as a result of natural disasters or conflict situations.

2. Report of the Senior Officers Meeting

The Conference adopted the report of the Senior Officers Meeting with the following recommendations:

2.1 Follow-up to the World Food Summit and World Food Summit: 5 Years Later-Regional Dimensions

2.1.1 For the attention of Governments

The Meeting **called upon** Governments to:

- i. Give due attention to developing and updating national strategies for agricultural development, with particular attention to sustainability, competitiveness, marketing and food security, as well as to formulating Regional Programmes for Food Security;

- ii. Encourage regional co-operation initiatives such as establishing a coordinated stand in the framework of multilateral agricultural trade negotiations, harmonizing agricultural policies and relevant legislations, promoting intra-regional agricultural trade and strengthening technical cooperation among countries of the Region;
- iii. Support the newly established Near East and North Africa Regional Network for Agricultural Policies –NENARNAP– and the Regional Network on Drought Management for the Near East and the Mediterranean, as well as other existing regional agricultural networks/associations, including: AARINENA, AFMANENA, CARDNE, NENARACA;
- iv. Intensify efforts to improve human resources development at all levels in the agricultural sector, with emphasis on reinforcing national agricultural research, technology-transfer, marketing and extension institutions; and
- v. Increase investment in agriculture and rural development, and support the role of the private sector.

2.1.2 For the attention of FAO

The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- i. Support Member countries in formulating appropriate national and regional strategies and programmes addressing sustainable agricultural development and food security;
- ii. Continue to support the Near East and North Africa Regional Network for Agricultural Policies – NENARNAP – and the Regional Network on Drought Management for the Near East and the Mediterranean, as well as other existing regional agricultural networks/associations;
- iii. Assist Member countries in enhancing human resources' capacity, introducing appropriate institutional and policy reforms related to changes in international and regional economic environment and continue providing technical support and capacity building for national experts on WTO and other multilateral agricultural trade negotiations;
- iv. Assist Member countries in strengthening national research, extension and marketing institutions, micro-agro enterprises, as well as strengthening extension/research linkages with due consideration to successful initiatives in the Region such as the Virtual Extension/Research Communication Network (VERCON); and

- v. Conduct a study on the impact of the Separation Wall on the agricultural sector and food security in the Palestinian Territories and mobilize financial support for rehabilitation of the agricultural sector.

2.2 International Alliance Against Hunger

The Meeting *agreed* that National Alliances could be important catalysts in mobilizing political will and resources at national and international levels, and could play a key role in reducing hunger. It was also agreed that a twin-track approach would address food security in all its dimensions mainly availability, accessibility/utilization and stability of food supplies.

2.3 Towards Improved Water Demand Management in the Near East

2.3.1. For the Attention of Governments

The Meeting **called upon** Governments to:

- i. Review water-related policies to introduce measures for reducing water loss and pollution, with a major focus on water scarcity and drought preparedness and mitigation as well as on establishing/reviewing water regulatory frameworks;
- ii. Enhance water use efficiency and consider the potential of cost recovery of irrigation services such as operation and maintenance costs;
- iii. Adopt structural adjustments to water demand and watershed management, including human resources development in agricultural water management, institutional reforms, organization of beneficiaries and their participation in irrigation schemes management, involving the private sector with emphasis on farmers and irrigation service providers; and
- iv. Promote usage of non-conventional water resources and support research on the safe reuse of treated wastewater and of brackish and saline water, giving due attention to rainfed agriculture, improving water-use efficiency and crop management, and the development of drought and salt-tolerant crop varieties.

2.3.2. For the Attention of FAO

The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- i. Continue providing technical assistance to member countries in policy, regulatory and institutional review processes and their implementation;
- ii. Assist member countries in the development, promotion and adoption of adapted technological packages on water demand and watershed management;
- iii. Support capacity building and facilitate exchange of experiences and information among member countries on relevant aspects of improved water management in agriculture;
- iv. Organize a regional workshop on water-harvesting and flood management to assist countries in developing appropriate strategies. In this respect, Iran offered to host and support such an event; and
- v. Advocate for improved water productivity in agriculture.

2.4 Food Safety and International Trade in the Near East Region

2.4.1 For the attention of Governments

The Meeting **called upon** Governments to:

- i. Modernize food control systems by creating a proper regulatory framework, strengthening the capacity of food inspection services, upgrading the capacity of food control laboratories, and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of relevant national institutions in order to minimize duplication;
- ii. Improve the capacities of national scientific and technical expertise and enhance participation in the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission;
- iii. Implement quality assurance systems in food production and processing; and
- iv. Strengthen the capacities for national food-borne diseases surveillance and create a rapid alert system and mechanism for communication with food control authorities for implementing necessary corrective measures, as well as in raising consumer awareness on these issues.

2.4.2 For the attention of FAO

The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- i. Continue providing support to strengthen the capacity of countries to manage food safety, through the provision of appropriate needs-based technical assistance, at regional, sub-regional and national levels, within the available financial and human resources of the Organization, and in collaboration with WHO; and
- ii. Use appropriate mechanisms to facilitate communication and information/experience exchange in food-borne disease surveillance among countries of the Region, as well as information about food-borne hazards.

2.5 Establishment of the Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA)

- i. The Meeting *appreciated* the invitation extended by Kuwait to host and support the Commission, when established.
- ii. Following a thorough discussion, the Meeting **resolved** to refer the “Agreement for Establishment of the Regional Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa” to the Ministerial Segment for a final decision.

2.6 Other Matters

2.6.1 Side Events

A. Roundtable on Financing Agricultural Development in the Near East

The Meeting *welcomed* FAO’s initiative for holding, in cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank, the Roundtable Meeting on Financing Agricultural Development in the Near East as a side-event to the Regional Conference. The Roundtable aimed at spearheading the discussion on the need and importance of increasing financial flows towards agricultural development. The Meeting **requested** FAO to consider holding follow-up events to further discuss ways and means to promote investment in agriculture, in collaboration with other partners-in-development and with countries of the Region. (Annex F includes the Summary Report of the Roundtable).

B. Sub-regional Strategy for Food Security for North Africa

The Meeting took note of the Side-event held on Sub-regional Strategy for Food Security for North Africa. The Side-event was attended by Representatives of all member

countries of the Sub-region. The side-event stressed the need and importance of continuing the technical collaboration between FAO and the Secretariat of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in formulating a Sub-regional Strategy and Programme for Food Security. It was agreed to continue the dialogue in that respect and FAO expressed its readiness to consider providing possible technical support for such process, as needed and requested. (Annex G includes more information on this side-event).

2.6.2 Desert Locust Control Efforts

The Conference noted with appreciation, FAO efforts in combating desert locust, through its EMPRES programme. It **urged** donor countries to provide urgent support for control of desert locust and bird swarms in the Western Region.

2.6.3 Rural Digital Divide

The Conference appreciated FAO's new programme for bridging the rural digital divide, and **invited** support for development of global partnerships to harness information and knowledge for enhancement of food security and poverty reduction, as well as human and institutional capacity building in this regard.

3. NGO's / CSO's Consultation for the Near East

In light of the WFS Plan of Action, the convening of NGO's/CSO's Consultations coinciding with FAO Regional Conferences has become a tradition since the 23rd FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. The present NGO's/CSO's Consultation convened from 11 – 13 March 2004 in Doha, Qatar, in parallel to the Regional Conference, involving a number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and Civil Society Organizations (CSO's). A short statement on this Consultation was presented to the Conference. The Conference took note of the NGO Consultation which underlined the importance of strengthened partnership with these active players to benefit from their experiences in working with local communities and grassroots organizations.

4. Proposed List of Topics to be Considered for the 28th Regional Conference for the Near East

The Conference formed a committee, consisting of representatives of three Governments (Iran, Morocco and Sudan) plus the Rapporteur and a member of FAO Secretariat, to assist in collecting proposed topics by member countries and to prepare a list of topics for consideration by the Conference. The Conference reviewed the various topics compiled by the committee and **requested** the Conference Secretariat to submit the approved condensed list of topics (shown below) to FAO/HQ for consideration and possible inclusion in the Conference Agenda for the 28th Regional Conference for the Near East:

- i. Refinement of marketing rules and regulations for adjustment to economic reforms and the new socio-economic changes.
- ii. Quality control and post-harvest handling of agricultural commodities.
- iii. Agricultural extension, research and technology transfer for sustainable agricultural development.
- iv. Organic farming in the Near East: issues, constraints and potentials.
- v. Investment for Agricultural Development: current situation, constraints and future prospects.
- vi. The role of private sector in financing and implementing irrigation projects.
- vii. Restructuring of the agricultural sector to cope with the new global changes.
- viii. Evaluation of country experiences on farmers participation in management of public irrigation systems (water users association).
- ix. Use of biotechnology and genetic engineering in support of rural development in the Near East: pros and cons.
- x. Identification of priority national and regional agricultural and food security projects and exploring possibilities for their finance and implementation.
- xi. Strengthening regional cooperation in controlling trans-boundary animal diseases.
- xii. Promotion of intra-regional livestock trade in the Near East Region.

5. Date and Place of the Twenty-eighth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

The Conference **welcomed** the offer, extended by the Government of Yemen to host the 28th FAO Regional Conference for the Near East and **requested** the Director-General of FAO to take this kind offer into consideration when deciding on the date and place of the coming Conference, in consultation with member governments of the Region.

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Organization of the Conference

1. The Twenty-seventh FAO Regional Conference for the Near East was held in Doha, State of Qatar, from 13 to 17 March 2004 at the kind invitation of the Government of Qatar. The Conference was attended by 92 delegates from 22 countries, and 38 observers. The list of participants is attached as Appendix B to this Report.

Inaugural Ceremony

2. The inaugural ceremony was attended by Ministers, representatives of member countries, observers, high-rank state officials, representatives of UN and Regional Organizations, NGOs, heads and representatives of diplomatic missions in the State of Qatar, as well as representatives from the news media.

3. His Highness Sheikh Abdallah Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Prime Minister, inaugurated the Conference. In his opening address, the Prime Minister welcomed all participants on behalf of his Government and conveyed the regards of His Highness the Prince of Qatar, and His Highness the Crown Prince of Qatar to the Conference. He expressed high appreciation to FAO and its Regional Office for the Near East for holding the 27th Regional Conference for the first time in Qatar.

4. His Highness stressed the importance of regional and international cooperation in the fight against hunger. In this regard, he reconfirmed his country's support to FAO's efforts for promoting agricultural development and food security, and to the FAO Director-General, in his continuous efforts towards achievement of these noble goals.

5. Dr. Jacques Diouf, the FAO Director-General, expressed his profound gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and to the Government and People of Qatar for their warm welcome and hospitality. He thanked His Highness Sheikh Abdalla Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Prime Minister of Qatar, for inaugurating the Conference and for the good arrangements made and excellent facilities provided for the Conference.

6. His Excellency Sheikh Ali Bin Saad Al-Kawari, Minister for Municipal Affairs and Agriculture, addressed the Conference and reiterated his country's appreciation to the continuous efforts exerted by FAO, in partnership with other international bodies concerned with agricultural development, to meet the commitment made by countries of the world in the World Food Summit in 1996.

7. The Minister concluded by stating that the best way to address economic and technical problems faced by countries of the Near East was through concerted efforts and enhanced collaboration among countries of the Region. He emphasized the importance of regional and sub-regional projects that deals with common problems and shared utilization of agricultural resources, including fisheries and livestock.

Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur

8 His Excellency Mr. Ali Bin Saad Al-Kawari, Minister for Municipal Affairs and Agriculture in Qatar, was unanimously elected Chairperson of the Conference.

9. The Conference resolved that all other Heads of Delegations would be Vice-Chairpersons.

10. Dr. Mohamed Said Harbi, Chairperson of the Near East Group of Permanent Representatives to FAO, was appointed as the Conference Rapporteur.

Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

11. The Conference adopted the Provisional Agenda NERC/04/1 (Appendix A) with one amendment to include discussion on the Establishment of the Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA), and introduced some changes to the Timetable NERC/04INF/2.

II. STATEMENTS

Statement by the Director-General

12. Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, presented his statement (Appendix D) in which he reviewed the state of food and agriculture in the world underlining issues of substantial interest to the Near East Region. The Director-General referred to the meeting of WTO General Council in December 2003, emphasizing that fair trading policy was essential for rural development and food security. He noted that commitment to achieving the Doha Development Agenda for the agricultural sector was reconfirmed at the Roundtable on this subject held during the 32nd session of FAO Conference. In this context, he stated that the role of FAO's Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP) was more important than ever. With this in mind, Dr. Diouf informed the Conference that FAO was planning to invite representatives from the ministries of trade to the next session of this Committee in February 2005.

13. The Director General briefed the Conference that during the *World Food Summit: five years later* held in June 2002, the Heads of States and Government resolved to hasten implementation of the Summit's Plan of Action and called for an International Alliance Against Hunger. He highlighted that national alliances were now being formed in member countries to mobilize governments, parliaments, NGOs, civil society, the private sector and agricultural organizations.

14. The Director-General noted that in spite of the diversity of climatic conditions, varying resources and different levels of economic development among countries of the Near East, they shared a number of similar challenges, which warranted a search for common solution which could be adapted to specific country situations. He pointed out that agriculture accounted for 13% of gross domestic product and employed 36% of the

population in the Region as a whole. Yet, it only accounted for 3% of national budgets which should reach at least 5% in the next five years.

15. The Director-General pointed out that scarcity of water constituted the most formidable challenge for agriculture in the Region. He noted that the 2002/2003 season was satisfactory because of favourable climatic conditions. Agriculture output grew 2.5% as compared to the negative annual growth of the preceding three years which was due to the severe drought that affected much of the Region. However, he noted with concern that six countries in the Region faced major food crises in 2003 as a result of natural disasters or conflict situations. Some countries also had to deal with an invasion of desert locust, despite control operations.

16. The Director-General highlighted salient points on the agenda starting with the regional dimensions in follow-up to the World Food Summit; the persistent situation of water scarcity; food safety and international trade; and establishment of the Animal Health Commission for the Near East, The Director-General also emphasized the importance of the Roundtable Meeting on Financing Agricultural Development, held as a side-event to the Regional Conference.

17. The Director-General drew attention to a number of challenges confronting agriculture in the Region, including the need for more effective water use; drought mitigation and monitoring climate change as additional measures to combat desertification. He highlighted the need for reform in banking systems to provide small farmers with adequate and timely access to credit, while safeguarding the viability of financing institutions. He further noted the need for upgrading food marketing systems to reduce post-harvest losses.

18. The Director-General concluded by reconfirming FAO's commitment to continue support to governments and regional partners in the implementation of coherent and effective programmes and in the mobilization of domestic and external sources of funding. He pointed out that FAO attached a great deal of importance to the collaboration with concerned regional organizations including the Arab League and regional economic organizations for the preparation and implementation of Regional Programmes for Food Security.

III. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Report on FAO Activities in the Near East Region During 2002-2003

19. Mr. Mohamad Albraithen, Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative for the Near East, briefed the Conference on FAO activities in the Region during the 2002-2003 biennium. He reviewed actions taken in response to the recommendations of the 26th FAO Regional Conference. for the Near East. Mr. Albraithen also described the main thrusts of the ongoing programme of work and advised on the future orientation of the programmes and activities of the Regional Office, in response to priority issues in the Region.

20. The Conference commended the wide and extensive range of FAO activities in the Region during the 2002-2003 biennium. The Conference **endorsed** the future orientation of the Regional Programme and expressed its satisfaction that this Programme would assist member governments in addressing issues of priority for food and agriculture in the Region.

Report of the Senior Officers Meeting

21. Following thorough examination, the Conference unanimously **adopted** the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting NERC/04/SOM/REP (Appendix E) with minor amendments.

Establishment of the Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA)

22. The Conference discussed the “Agreement for Establishment of the Regional Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa” referred to it by the Senior Officers Meeting. Following a thorough examination, the Conference **agreed** that member countries would review the document “Agreement for the Establishment of the Regional Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa” and forward their consent or views to the FAO Regional Representative for the Near East.

23. The Conference further **requested** the Regional Office to act as focal point for follow-up with member countries on the establishment of the Commission, and to act according to their responses and FAO rules and regulations.

General Debate

24. The Conference discussed specific points related to the FAO Regional Office activities and programmes, and to the Report of the Senior Officers' Meeting. In addition, country delegates highlighted a range of issues of interest to the Region, reconfirming key recommendations of the Senior Officers Meeting which have been adopted by the Conference.

25. The Conference commended FAO and its Regional Office for the Near East for its continued support to countries of the Region, including support to national efforts for development of agriculture at small-scale farmer level, and enhancement of food security. The Conference **requested** FAO to continue providing support to member countries, especially those facing major food crises as a result of natural disasters or conflict situations.

NGO's/CSO's Consultation for the Near East

26. In support of the WFS Plan of Action, the convening of NGO's/CSO's Consultations coinciding with FAO Regional Conferences has become a tradition since

the 23rd FAO Regional Conference held in Rabat, Morocco. The present Regional NGO's/CSO's Consultation convened from 11 – 13 March 2004 in Doha, Qatar, in parallel to the Regional Conference, involving a number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and Civil Society Organizations (CSO's). A short statement on this Consultation was presented to the Conference. The Conference took note of the NGO Consultation which underlined the importance of strengthened partnership with these active players to benefit from their experiences in working with local communities and grassroots organizations.

IV. OTHER MATTERS

Proposed List of Topics to be Considered at the 28th Regional Conference for the Near East

27. The Conference formed a committee, consisting of representatives of three Governments (Iran, Morocco and Sudan) plus the Rapporteur and a member of FAO Secretariat, to assist in collecting proposed topics by member countries and to prepare a list of topics for consideration by the Conference. The Conference reviewed the various topics compiled by the committee and **requested** the Conference Secretariat to submit the approved condensed list of topics (shown below) to FAO/HQ for consideration and possible inclusion in the Conference Agenda for the 28th Regional Conference for the Near East:

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- ii. Quality control and post-harvest handling of agricultural commodities.
- iii. Agricultural extension, research and technology transfer for sustainable agricultural development.
- iv. Organic farming in the Near East: issues, constraints and potentials.
- v. Investment for Agricultural Development: current situation, constraints and future prospects.
- vi. The role of private sector in financing and implementing irrigation projects.
- vii. Restructuring of the agricultural sector to cope with the new global changes.
- viii. Evaluation of country experiences on farmers participation in management of public irrigation systems (water users association).
- ix. Use of biotechnology and genetic engineering in support of rural development in the Near East: pros and cons.
- x. Identification of priority national and regional agricultural and food security projects and exploring possibilities for their finance and implementation.
- xi. Strengthening regional cooperation in controlling trans-boundary animal diseases.
- xii. Promotion of intra-regional livestock trade in the Near East Region.

V.

CONCLUDING ITEMS

Date and Place of the Twenty-eighth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

28. The Conference **welcomed** the offer extended by the Government of Yemen to host the 28th FAO Regional Conference for the Near East and **requested** the Director-General of FAO to take this kind offer into consideration when deciding on the date and place of the coming Conference, in consultation with member Governments of the Region.

Adoption of the Conference Report

29. The Conference **adopted** the Report with minor amendments.

Closure of the Conference

30. On behalf of FAO, Mr. Mohamad Albraithen, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East, expressed his deep appreciation to His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani and to the Government and people of the State of Qatar for hosting the Conference and for the excellent facilities and arrangements which contributed to the success of the Conference. Mr. Albraithen thanked H. E. Mr. Ali Bin Saad Al-Kawari, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture, and the Organizing Committee for all their efforts and contributions in preparation for and organization of the Conference.

31. His Excellency Mr. Salim Bin Hilal Al-Khalili, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Sultanate of Oman, spoke on behalf of the delegates expressing thanks and appreciation to the Government and People of Qatar for their warm welcome and hospitality. Mr. Al-Khalili commended FAO for its valuable efforts and services in promoting food security in the world, under the leadership of Dr. Diouf. He proposed sending a cable of thanks to His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, for the generous hospitality and kind welcome provided to all participants of the Conference.

32. The Conference Rapporteur, Dr. Mohamed Harbi, Chairperson of the Near East Group of Permanent Representatives to FAO, reiterated deep thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Prince of Qatar, and to the Government and People of Qatar for hosting the Conference. He extended his thanks to Dr. Jacques Diouf for his continuous support to the fight against poverty and hunger, particularly in this Region. Dr. Harbi also commended staff of the FAO Regional Office for the Near East, headed by Mr. Mohamed Albraithen, for their action in implementing recommendations of the 26th Regional Conference and their relentless efforts in support of food security in the Region.

33. In his closing statement, His Excellency Mr. Ali Bin Saad Al-Kawari, Minister of Agriculture and Municipal Affairs and Chairperson of the Conference, expressed his deep appreciation to FAO under the leadership of Dr. Jacques Diouf, and to distinguished participants from Member countries for their attendance and active participation.

34. The Chairperson declared the Conference closed at 10:00 hrs, on Wednesday, 17 March 2004.

Revised Agenda

(A) SENIOR OFFICERS MEETING
13-15 March 2004

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

- 1. Opening of the Senior Officers Meeting**
- 2. Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur**
- 3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable**

II. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

- 4. "Follow-up to the World Food Summit and the World Food Summit: *five years later - Regional Dimensions*"**
- 5. International Alliance Against Hunger**
- 6. Towards Improved Water Demand Management in the Near East**
- 7. Food Safety and International Trade in the Near East Region**
- 8. Establishment of Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA)**
- 9. Report of the 3rd Session of Agriculture, Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East (ALAWUC).**

III. OTHER MATTERS

- 10. Side Events:**
 - i. Round Table on Financing Agriculture**
 - ii. Sub-regional Strategy for Food Security in North Africa**
- 11. Desert Locust Control Efforts**
- 12. Rural Digital Divide**

IV. CONCLUDING ITEMS

- 13. Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting**
- 14. Closure of the Senior Officers Meeting**

(B) MINISTERIAL MEETING
16-17 March 2004

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

- 1. Inaugural Ceremony**
- 2. Election of Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur**
- 3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable**

II. STATEMENTS

- 4. Statement by the FAO Director-General**

III. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

- 5. Action Taken on the Main Recommendations of the Twenty-Sixth Regional Conference for the Near East and the FAO Activities in the Region During 2002-2003.**
- 6. Report of the Senior Officers Meeting**
- 7. Establishment of Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA)**
- 8. General Debate on Regional Programme**
- 9. Report of the NGO's/CSO's Consultation**

IV. OTHER MATTERS

- 10. Proposed list of topics to be considered at the Twenty-Eighth Regional Conference**

V. CONCLUDING ITEMS

- 11. Date and Place of the 28th. Regional Conference for the Near East**
- 12. Adoption of the Report of the Regional Conference (including the Senior Officers Meeting Report)**
- 13. Closure of the Conference**

APPENDIX B

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

OFFICERS OF THE CONFERENCE

Chairman:

H.E. Ali Ben Saad AL-KAWARI
Minister for Municipal Affairs and
Agriculture
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and
Agriculture Doha

Vice-Chairperson:

All Heads of Delegations

Rapporteur:

Mohamed Said Ali Mohamed HARBI
Permanent Representative of the Republic of
Sudan to FAO, Rome
Chairman of the Near East Group, Rome

MEMBER NATIONS OF THE REGION

AFGHANISTAN

ALGERIA

Delegate

Abdesselam CHELGHOUM
Secretary-General
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
Algeria

Alternate

Mohamed Nadji BENCHEIKH LEHOCINE
Director of Studies
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
Algeria

AZERBAIJAN

BAHRAIN

Delegate

Hassan ABDEL KARIM
Assistant Undersecretary for Water and Land
Ministry of Municipalities Affairs & Agriculture
Manama

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List of Documents

Discussion Items

NERC/04/1	Annotated Agenda
NERC/04/2	Action Taken on the Main Recommendations of the Twenty-Sixth Regional Conference for the Near East and the FAO Activities in the Region during 2002-2003
NERC/04/3	Follow-up to the World Food Summit and <i>the World Food Summit: five years later</i> - Regional Dimensions
NERC/04/4	Towards Improved Water Demand Management in the Near East
NERC/04/5	Food Safety and International Trade in the Near East Region
NERC/04/6	Establishment of the Regional Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA)

Information Items

NERC/04/INF/1	Information Note
NERC/04/INF/2	Timetable
NERC/04/INF/3	List of Documents
NERC/04/INF/4	Statement by the FAO Director-General
NERC/04/INF/5	Forests and Tree Contribution to Environment, Water and Food Security
NERC/04/INF/6	The Role of Rural Micro-finance in Sustainable Agricultural Development
NERC/04/INF/7	Promoting Agricultural Research and Extension for Sustainable Development in the Near East: <i>A Framework for Action</i>
NERC/02/INF/8	Policy Framework for Mainstreaming Gender in Agriculture and Rural Development in the Near East Region
NERC/04/INF/9	The International Year of Rice 2004
NERC/04/INF/10	FAO Strategic Framework for Bridging the Rural Digital Divide
NERC/04/INF/11	Initiative to Support the Review and Update of National Strategies and Policies for Food Security and Agricultural Development: <i>Perspective from the Near East Region</i>

STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

*Your Highness Sheikh Abdalla Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Prime Minister of Qatar,
Distinguished Ministers,
Honorable Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the Twenty-Seventh FAO Regional Conference for the Near East which is being held here in Doha at the kind invitation of the Government of Qatar. On behalf of the Organization and in the name of all of you, I should like to express our profound gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani and his Government for their warm welcome and hospitality.

*Your Highness,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

(State of food and agriculture in the world)

During the first half of the 1990s, the number of hungry people in the world declined by 37 million. In contrast, during the second half of the decade, it increased by 18 million. Positive achievements in many countries were countered by setbacks in many others. In 1999-2001, there were 842 million undernourished people in the world, including 798 million in the developing countries, 34 million in the countries in transition and 10 million in the industrialized countries. At this rate, the World Food Summit's objective of halving the number of hungry people by 2015 will only be achieved in 2150.

In 2003, world cereal utilization totalled some 1970 million tonnes, exceeding production by 100 million tonnes.

The prices of many export commodities from developing countries are now lower than ever. Moreover, 43 countries earn more than 20 percent of their total export revenue and more than 50 percent of their total agricultural revenue from just one commodity.

After the failure of the Cancun Ministerial Conference, negotiations have resumed following the meeting of the WTO General Council in December 2003. Commitment to achieving the Doha Development Agenda for the agricultural sector was confirmed at the Round Table on this subject held during the 32nd Session of the FAO Conference because fair trading policy is essential for rural development and food security. In this context, the role of FAO's Committee on Commodity Problems is more important than ever. It is with this in mind that I wish to invite representatives of the ministries of trade to the next session of this Committee in February 2005.

At constant 1995 prices, external aid to agricultural development fell from US\$27 billion to between US\$10 and 15 billion during the 1990s, whereas the amount should be doubled and agriculture's share of national budgets should be increased if there is to be accelerated progress in reducing undernourishment.

(Roundtables on financing for agricultural development)

It is to mobilize such financial resources that FAO has decided to organize, with the regional development banks, round tables on financing for agriculture alongside each of its 2004 Regional Conferences in the developing regions.

(World Food Summit: five years later)

During the June 2002 *World Food Summit: five years later* held in Rome, the Heads of State and Government resolved to hasten implementation of the Summit's Plan of Action and called for an International Alliance Against Hunger.

National alliances are thus being formed in member countries to mobilize governments, parliaments, NGOs, civil society, the private sector and agricultural organizations.

(Agriculture)

The developing countries need to take up the challenge of agricultural productivity and market competitiveness to improve their food security.

Soil is currently under accelerated degradation, affecting 21 million hectares of arable land. In the arid and semi-arid areas that cover 45 percent of the world's land surface, the integrated management of land, water and fertilizer can significantly mitigate this situation.

Urban and peri-urban agriculture and home and school micro-gardens would help rapidly improve the nutritional status of poor population groups with relatively modest levels of investment. FAO has undertaken such projects in all regions of the world, notably with Technical Cooperation Programme resources and TeleFood funds.

Livestock sustains some 800 millions rural poor and meets 30 to 40 percent of total food requirements.

Transboundary animal diseases, such as foot-and-mouth disease, haemorrhagic fever, Rift Valley fever, swine fever, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia and avian influenza, are sources of concern for trade and public health. Yet, real progress has been made in this domain. The battle against old and new epidemics is a major challenge that FAO and its partners are striving to meet under the Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases (EMPRES).

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources has already been ratified by 34 countries. It will come into force when this number reaches 40 countries, probably during the first half of 2004.

(Forestry)

A ministerial meeting on forestry will be convened in Rome in 2005 to study the recommendations of the Regional Commissions and to make strategic decisions on the future of the sector, especially to strengthen measures against forest fires.

(Fisheries)

In the fisheries sector, almost 10 percent of the world's fish stocks are depleted and 18 percent are overexploited, mainly because of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, more efficient new technologies and excess fishing capacity. The situation is aggravated by the absence of monitoring and surveillance of vessels, employing satellite transponder technology in particular.

FAO will therefore be convening a meeting of Fisheries Ministers at its headquarters in 2005 to give renewed impetus to the actions that are needed in this sector.

(Sustainable agricultural development)

As regards sustainable agriculture and rural development, FAO is formulating a four-year project for mountain regions.

The International Conference of Small Island Developing States will be held in Mauritius in August 2004. FAO is actively involved in this initiative and will organize a Ministerial Conference on the Development of Agriculture in Small Island States in Rome in 2005.

Although women account for 60 percent of agricultural production in developing countries, they still have unequal access to productive resources. FAO is striving to tackle this problem, devising specific indicators for appropriate policies.

(Emergency situations)

At the end of 2003, 38 countries were faced with serious food shortages that required international assistance. Yet, food aid in cereals fell to 7.4 million tonnes in 2001-02, down 23 percent from 2000-01.

Eight million small farmers and agricultural workers died from HIV/AIDS between 1985 and 2000 in the 25 most affected countries. FAO is involved in the fight against this pandemic, conducting surveys of the impact on food security and developing agricultural production techniques that are less labour intensive.

*Your Highness,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

(State of food and agriculture in the region)

The Near East is composed of countries that have diverse climatic conditions, varying resources and different levels of economic development. Nevertheless, the challenges they face share a number of similarities, which warrants a search for common solutions that can be adapted to specific country situations.

For the region as a whole, agriculture accounts for 13 percent of gross domestic product and employs 36 percent of the population, yet it only accounts for 3 percent of national budgets which should reach at least 5 percent in the next five years.

In 2002 and 2003 the region experienced several conflicts that increased the number of internally displaced persons and refugees, with a direct negative impact on agricultural production, food security and the environment. The oil producing countries were affected by unstable oil prices, while other countries were faced with a fall in remittances from their nationals working abroad, a drop in revenue from tourism and a lower level of external assistance.

Some 15 percent of the region's total population are undernourished. This is among the lowest figures for developing regions but it conceals large differences between countries. While the situation is worrying as the proportion of undernourished in the region has not fallen since 1990-92, some countries have already achieved the World Food Summit target. I am convinced that the region as a whole can also reach this target in 2015 if it redoubles its efforts.

Scarcity of water constitutes the most formidable challenge for agriculture in the region. Sixteen countries have less than 500 cubic meters of water from internal renewable water resources per capita per year, as against an average of 6000 cubic meters in the developing countries. Present over consumption and deterioration of water resources, coupled with growing competition from non-agricultural uses, are expected to influence the availability and cost of water used for food production. Furthermore, almost all the countries of the region are experiencing problems of salinity and water logging.

Degradation of natural resources is especially serious in the low-rainfall areas that represent 70 percent of the region's total land area. Demographic pressure, the cultivation of marginal and fragile lands and the inappropriate use of inputs have all contributed to ecosystem degradation.

The 2002/03 season was nevertheless satisfactory because of favourable climatic conditions. Agricultural output grew 2.5 percent as compared to the negative annual growth of the preceding three years which was due to the severe drought that affected much of the region.

The long-term trend for per capita food production in the region suggests a slight improvement.

However, agricultural production falls short of burgeoning demand. Dependence on imports has intensified, in particular for cereals, dairy products, sugar and vegetable oil. The value of agricultural imports in 2002 was US\$36.7 billion, which is 3.5 times the value of annual agricultural exports.

Net cereal imports rose from 6.5 million tonnes in 1960-71 to 55 million tonnes in 1999, and are projected to reach 78 million tonnes by 2010, which would represent half the total imports of all developing countries.

(Emergency and rehabilitation)

Six countries of the region faced major food crises in 2003 as a result of natural disasters or conflict situations.

Some countries also had to deal with an invasion of desert locusts. Despite control operations, swarms formed in many African countries and spread to Algeria, Morocco, southern Egypt, the northern Red Sea and Saudi Arabia.

(The Conference agenda)

*Your Highness,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

(Follow-up to the World Food Summit)

The document on the follow-up to the World Food Summit and the *World Food Summit: five years later* focuses mainly on the Regional Programme for Food Security in the Near East. It also reports the outcome of the meeting of regional economic organizations that was held in June 2002 in Rome, with particular reference to the strategic vision and regional support to national efforts to alleviate hunger and poverty in rural areas.

(Water scarcity)

Your attention is drawn to the need to improve the management of water demand, notably for agriculture, the main user sector. Relevant in this connection are some of the recommendations of the Regional Conference on Water Demand Management which was held in Egypt in December 2003 as part of the International Year of Freshwater.

(Food safety and international trade)

Food safety and international trade in agricultural commodities are of primary importance to the countries of the region. Many countries have the necessary potential to expand their food exports but need to adjust their legislative and regulatory systems as well as their institutional capacity to adapt to international standards.

(Animal Health Commission for the Near East)

The Conference is invited to review a draft agreement on the creation of the Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa, prior to submission to the Governments.

(Round Table on financing for agriculture)

For the first time, a Round Table was organized in parallel to the Conference and in cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank, on Financing Agriculture Development. It offered a forum for discussing investment in agricultural development projects and measures to bolster agriculture's share of national budgets. The role of leading partners in financing agriculture and rural activities was also addressed.

(A look to the future and the major challenges for the Near East)

*Your Highness,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Agriculture in the region is confronted with a number of challenges. I should like to draw particular attention to the need to ensure a more effective use of water. Mitigation of drought and monitoring of climate change are two of the additional measures needed to combat desertification.

Special attention needs to be given to access to land by nomadic pastoralists in the arid and semi-arid regions.

Reform to the banking system needs to be envisaged to provide farmers and small farmers, in particular, with adequate and timely access to credit so that they can acquire inputs, while at the same time safeguarding the viability of financing institutions and the recovery of loans.

Food marketing systems need to be upgraded, so that countries are in a position to reduce their post-harvest losses.

With proper leadership and the political will, the countries of the Near East can rise to these challenges. FAO will continue to support governments and regional partners in the implementation of coherent and effective programmes and in the mobilization of domestic and external sources of funding. It attaches a great deal of hope in its collaboration with the Arab League and the Regional Economic Unions for the preparation and implementation of a Regional Programme for Food Security.

I wish you every success in your work and thank you for your kind attention.

APPENDIX E

**NERC/04/SOM/REP
March 2004**

**TWENTY-SEVENTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE
FOR THE NEAR EAST**

**REPORT OF THE
SENIOR OFFICERS MEETING**

Doha, State of Qatar, 13-15 March 2004

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Regional Office for the Near East

Cairo 2004

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Organization of the Meeting

1. The Senior Officers Meeting of the Twenty-seventh FAO Regional Conference for the Near East was held from 13 to 15 March 2004 in Doha, State of Qatar.

Inaugural Ceremony

2. The Meeting was inaugurated by Mr Ibrahim Bin Rashid Al-Misned, Undersecretary of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture, and addressed by Mr. Mohamad Albraithen, Assistant Director-General and FAO Regional Representative for the Near East. In attendance, there were 58 delegates from 20 countries, and 18 observers. The Meeting was also attended by a number of senior officers from the host country, representatives of UN and Regional Organizations and representatives from the news media. The list of participants is given as Appendix B.

3. His Excellency Mr. Al-Misned expressed his sincere thanks to FAO and its Regional Office for the Near East for convening the FAO Regional Conference in Doha and for its continuous efforts in providing technical assistance to member countries in support of sustainable agricultural development and food security.

4. Mr. Albraithen, in his Opening Statement, expressed his thanks and appreciation for His Highness the Prince of Qatar, and the People and Government of Qatar for their warm welcome and hospitality. He thanked Mr. Al-Misned for inaugurating the Meeting and for the valuable efforts exerted by the Ministry and the organizing committee, as well as the excellent arrangements and facilities provided for the success of the. He also thanked the senior officers and representatives of member countries and International and Regional Organizations for their attendance.

5. The Regional Representative highlighted the importance of the Senior Officers Meeting as an integral part of the Regional Conference and as a preparatory forum for in-depth discussions of technical issues of concern to the Near East. He reviewed the Meeting Agenda and hoped that it would reach positive viable recommendations.

6. Mr. Albraithen pointed out the significance of the Roundtable on Financing Agricultural Development which was convened as a side event to the Conference, commending the constructive collaboration between FAO and the Islamic Development Bank under the leadership of H.E. Dr. Ahmed Mohamad Ali.

Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur

7. The Meeting unanimously elected Mr. Ibrahim Bin Rashid Al-Misned, Undersecretary of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture (Qatar), as its Chairperson and resolved that all other Heads of Delegations for the Senior Officers' Meeting would be Vice-Chairpersons. Ms Wafa' Al-Dikah Hamze (Lebanon) was appointed Rapporteur.

Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

8. The Provisional Annotated Agenda (NERC/004/1) and Timetable (NERC/04/INF/2) were adopted without amendments.

II. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Follow-up to the World Food Summit and the *World Food Summit: Five Years Later*- Regional Dimensions

9. The Meeting reviewed Document NERC/04/3 "Follow-up to the *World Food Summit and World Food Summit: Five Years Later* - Regional Dimensions", which provided a summary of the salient follow-up actions taken in the Near East Region to implement the World Food Summit Plan of Action, highlighting the Region's particular needs, opportunities and constraints.

10. The Meeting noted with satisfaction FAO efforts for renewing the political will to achieve the goals of the World Food Summit and for holding the WFS: *five years later*, in June 2002. The Meeting also appreciated FAO efforts to monitor the food insecurity and hunger in the world in close collaboration with member countries.

11. The Meeting recognized that the existence of hunger in a world of plenty was not just a moral outrage; it was also short-sighted from an economic viewpoint, underlining that productivity of individuals and the growth of entire nations were severely compromised by widespread hunger. Hence, it was in the self-interest of every country to eradicate hunger.

12. The Meeting noted that rapid progress in cutting the incidence of chronic hunger in developing countries would be possible if political will was mobilized. The Meeting agreed that a twin-track approach was required, combining the promotion of quick-response agricultural growth, with targeted programmes to ensure that hungry people could have access to adequate food supplies. The Meeting stressed that such approaches were mutually reinforcing, since programmes to enhance direct and immediate access to food offer new outlets for expanded production.

13. The Meeting noted with concern that progress in reducing the number of hungry people was very slow. The average annual decrease since 1996 has been only 2.5 million, far below the level required to reach the WFS goal. The Meeting underlined that progress would now have to be accelerated to reach 24 million per year, almost 10 times the current rate of reduction, in order to reach that goal.

14. The Meeting noted that the food gap in the Region was expected to increase by around 54 percent in 2010, compared with that of 1995, reflecting an annual increase of 2.9 percent. The Meeting recognized that the Near East Region faced special problems in ensuring food security, given the relatively scarce resources of arable land and water, and the resultant gap between domestic food production and consumer demand. Increasing quantities of food imports would be required to meet the needs of the fast growing population.

15. The Meeting expressed concern over the deteriorating situation in the agricultural sector and food security in the Palestinian Territories and the destruction of infrastructure, especially due to construction of the “Separation Wall.” It invited FAO to provide, within available resources, support for the rehabilitation of the Palestinian agricultural sector.

16. The Meeting noted that the performance of intra-regional trade, including agricultural trade, remained low and stagnant. The Meeting recognized that the salient features of the overall regional agricultural trade included the following: low share of intra-regional trade, declining trends of agricultural exports, high dependency on food imports and heavy reliance on exporting primary commodities.

17. The Meeting recognized that, for many countries in the Region, future economic and food security prospects would be largely contingent upon agricultural performance and increasing yield. Adequate agricultural production growth would be needed to limit dependence on food imports, meet the growing food needs of urban populations and improve the food security and incomes of poor rural populations.

18. The Meeting noted with concern that sustainable agricultural production throughout much of the Region was constrained by the serious degradation of the natural resources, particularly water and land resources. This was due to inefficient and unsustainable use of water resources, soil erosion, desertification, water-logging and salinity. The Meeting stressed that managing natural resources, particularly water resources, in an efficient and sustainable manner clearly constituted the greatest challenge for food production in the Region in the coming years.

19. The Meeting recognized that, despite resource constraints and adverse climatic conditions, in the Region, food output could increase by over 70 percent by the year 2010 as compared with 1988-1990 production levels, according to FAO projections. This could be achieved by an integrated approach combining production intensification, relevant research, effective extension and efficient marketing systems. The Meeting also highlighted the high returns from investment in agriculture in the Region as compared to other regions of the world and **urged** for increased investment in agriculture.

20. The Meeting **called upon** Governments to:

- Give due attention to developing and updating national strategies for agricultural development, with particular attention to sustainability, competitiveness, marketing and food security, as well as to formulating Regional Programmes for Food Security;
- Encourage regional co-operation initiatives such as establishing a coordinated stand in the framework of multilateral agricultural trade negotiations, harmonizing agricultural policies and relevant legislations, promoting intra-regional agricultural trade and strengthening technical cooperation among countries of the Region;
- Support the newly established Near East and North Africa Regional Network for Agricultural Policies – NENARNAP- and the Regional Network on Drought Management for the Near East and the Mediterranean, as well as other existing regional agricultural

networks/associations, including: AARINENA, AFMANENA, CARDNE, NENARACA;

- Intensify efforts to improve human resources development at all levels in the agricultural sector, with emphasis on reinforcing national agricultural research, technology-transfer, marketing and extension institutions; and
- Increase investment in agriculture and rural development, and support the role of the private sector.

21. The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- Support member countries in formulating appropriate national and regional strategies and programmes addressing sustainable agricultural development and food security;
- Continue to support the Near East and North Africa Regional Network for Agricultural Policies – NENARNAP – and the Regional Network on Drought Management for the Near East and the Mediterranean, as well as other existing regional agricultural networks/associations;
- Assist member countries in enhancing human resources’ capacity, introducing appropriate institutional and policy reforms related to changes in international and regional economic environment and continue providing technical support and capacity building for national experts on WTO and other multilateral agricultural trade negotiations;
- Assist member countries in strengthening national research, extension and marketing institutions, micro-agro enterprises, as well as strengthening extension/research linkages with due consideration to successful initiatives in the Region such as the Virtual Extension/Research Communication Network (VERCON)
- Conduct a study on the impact of the “Separation Wall” on the agricultural sector and food security in the Palestinian Territories and mobilize financial support for rehabilitation of the agricultural sector.

International Alliance Against Hunger

22. The Meeting *appreciated* that national alliances were being established as an outcome of the WFS: *five years later* which recognized “*the urgent need to reinforce efforts of all concerned partners as an international alliance against hunger, for the fulfilment of the 1996 Summit*”. The Meeting also recognized that national alliances could be building blocks for the International Alliance Against Hunger. The main aim of this alliance was to facilitate initiatives at local and national levels by which the poor and hungry are enabled to achieve food security on a sustainable basis by mobilizing political will, technical expertise and financial resources.

23. The Meeting also *agreed* that National Alliances could be important catalysts in mobilizing political will and resources at national and international levels, and could play a key role in reducing hunger. It was also agreed that a twin-track approach would

address food security in all its dimensions mainly availability, accessibility/utilization and stability of food supplies.

Towards Improved Water Demand Management in the Near East

24. The Meeting examined Document NERC/04/04 “Towards Improved Water Demand Management in the Near East” and discussed the proposed available options for water demand management in agriculture for the Region.

25. The Meeting noted the importance of the irrigation sector in the Region and its contribution to food security as well as its role in the economies and rural development. It also noted with concern that the Near East Region was facing a huge challenge with water shortages and food insecurity. Based on available data and future projections, the Meeting warned that available water resources were evidently insufficient to meet the expected food demand in the coming years.

26. The Meeting acknowledged that water scarcity, deteriorating quality, and the rising cost of irrigation were key issues. The Meeting urged countries to intensify efforts to promote more efficient measures for managing scarce water and agricultural land in a sustainable manner.

27. The Meeting noted that water demand management offered means of replacing the need for additional water resources and could forestall certain supply costs. It underlined that appropriate water demand management was not to replace supply-side sources and investment but rather to encourage a cost effective mix of supply and conservation resources. The Meeting stressed the need for focussing on improving water use efficiency and productivity. It also emphasized the importance of promoting intraregional trade in agricultural products to meet the food needs of water-deficit countries from other water-rich countries in the Region.

28. The Meeting considered that cost recovery of water services was essential for inducing higher productivity of water, underlining that needs of poor farmers should be given due consideration. In addition, other dissuasive and persuasive measures were necessary, particularly awareness on water shortage both at the highest possible level of decision-making and at that of water users. In this respect, great efforts were needed to change less efficient traditional irrigation practices.

29. The Meeting observed that small-scale farming could be productive in marginal rainfed areas if supplementary irrigation is available to overcome short-term droughts that were critical to crop yield. Land improvement techniques and integrated watershed development have shown promising results. The Meeting identified that farmers in rainfed areas needed support to reduce the risk and achieve their production potential.

30. The Meeting agreed that there were considerable potential benefits to be gained from the use of treated wastewater for irrigation. However, the Meeting highlighted the need for careful management and professional monitoring to reduce the potential risks of pollution loads. Clean up technologies and management tools were available, but technical assistance and regional cooperation were needed to transfer and adopt them.

31. The Meeting noted that recent regional and international events on irrigation advisory services, organized by FAO, identified lack of or low capacity in irrigation advisory services as one of the main constraints to improving irrigation performance and stressed the need to give this issue priority. It considered developing the capacity of irrigation stakeholders essential to overcome lack of skills, inadequate organization, ineffective legislation and insufficient motivation that often jeopardized the best irrigation projects.

32. The Meeting **called upon** Governments to:

- Review water-related policies to introduce measures for reducing water loss and pollution, with a major focus on water scarcity and drought preparedness and mitigation, as well as on establishing/reviewing water regulatory frameworks;
- Enhance water use efficiency and consider the potential of cost recovery of irrigation services such as operation and maintenance costs;
- Adopt structural adjustments to water demand and watershed management, including human resources development in agricultural water management, institutional reforms, organization of beneficiaries and their participation in irrigation scheme management, involving the private sector, with emphasis on farmers and irrigation service providers; and
- Promote usage of non-conventional water resources and support research on the safe reuse of treated wastewater and of brackish and saline water, giving due attention to rainfed agriculture, improving water-use efficiency and crop management, and the development of drought and salt-tolerant crop varieties.

33. The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- Continue providing technical assistance to member countries in policy, regulatory and institutional review processes and their implementation;
- Assist member countries in the development, promotion and adoption of adapted technological packages on water demand and watershed management;
- Support capacity building and facilitate exchange of experiences and information among Member countries on relevant aspects of improved water management in agriculture;
- Organize a regional workshop on water-harvesting and flood management and to assist countries in developing appropriate strategies. In this respect, Iran offered to host and support such event; and
- Advocate for improved water productivity in agriculture.

Food Safety and International Trade in the Near East Region

34. The Meeting considered Document NERC/04/5 “Food Safety and International Trade in the Near East Region” and noted that food safety had ascended to the forefront of international trade discussions following the conclusion of the Uruguay Round in 1995. Since then, Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) standards and regulations in

developed countries have become increasingly comprehensive, and stringent, in some cases restricting trade and/or significantly increasing the costs of food exports from countries in the Near East Region.

35. The Meeting recognized that with the growing scarcity of natural resources, especially water, meeting food needs and ensuring food security depend to a large extent on food imports; therefore, systems to control their quality and safety were vital for public health. Food exports, on the other hand, provided important means for countries in the Region (non-oil economies in particular) to generate foreign exchange. Therefore, the Meeting underlined that effective food safety systems were critical to maintain and expand market shares in food and agricultural exports.

36. The Meeting recognized that although several countries in the Region have been taking steps to develop new and improved food safety systems, like drafting new food legislation according to international requirements, developing national strategies for food control, harmonizing food standards with Codex Alimentarius, introducing good manufacturing practices (GMP) and quality assurance, and moving towards an approach based on risk management, the capacity of most countries needed still to be improved in order to effectively control the safety of locally produced and imported food, and to ensure and demonstrate compliance with food safety standards for export markets. This was of particular importance as the Region's exports were dominated by fruits, vegetables, olive oil and fish, for which food safety requirements were very strict and continuously changing, particularly in the EU markets, where food standards were higher than other export markets.

37. The Meeting noted that even though, there was growing acceptance and increasing use of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) throughout the Region; these were still undertaken by industries on a voluntary basis. The Meeting also noted that food control systems in many countries in the Region were still overly fragmented, less developed, or outdated. At the national level, responsibility for food safety is usually shared between several different ministries and departments with little clarity on roles, and weak coordination among the institutions involved. In some countries, food legislations were not separate from the more general public health or fraud prevention legislations. In others, the domestic inspection systems continued to focus primarily on end-product control.

38. The Meeting noted that in spite of some countries' successful adoption of the risk analysis approach, many countries still enforced requirements and restriction on imports which lack scientific justification. In addition, the Meeting expressed concern that food-borne disease surveillance mechanisms were not well developed in most countries; and information, when available, was not communicated to food control authorities.

39. The Meeting also noted with concern that several countries faced difficulties in meeting international safety and quality standards because of their weak capacity in scientific research, testing, and demonstrating conformity and equivalence. This has led to rejection of food shipments from some countries in the Region and sometimes to product bans which have resulted in significant economic losses for the exporting

countries and in considerable difficulties to re-enter and regain market shares in once important developed country markets.

40. The Meeting highlighted that, in general, most countries in the Region had limited capacity and funds to plan and implement policies that affect food safety and trade, to implement relevant international agreements, to take advantage of trade opportunities, and to participate in the works of international standards-setting bodies like the Codex Alimentarius.

41. The Meeting emphasized that countries in the Region faced the challenge of raising the SPS standards of food exports to reach internationally recognized levels, as well as the often higher standards set by developed countries, and of being prepared for the upcoming challenges related to the testing and certification of food imports and exports, including food derived from genetically modified organisms, traceability, organic food and the provisions of scientific risk assessment whenever there was diversion from international standards.

42. The Meeting **called upon** Governments to:

- Modernize food control systems by creating a proper regulatory framework, strengthening the capacity of food inspection services, upgrading the capacity of food control laboratories, and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of relevant national institutions in order to minimize duplication.
- Improve the capacity of national scientific and technical expertise and enhance participation in the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.
- Implement quality assurance systems in food production and processing.
- Strengthen the capacities for national food-borne diseases surveillance and create a rapid alert system and mechanism for communication with food control authorities for implementing necessary corrective measures, as well as in raising consumer awareness on these issues.

43. The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- Continue providing support to strengthen the capacity of countries to manage food safety, through the provision of appropriate needs-based technical assistance, at regional, sub-regional and national levels, within the available financial and human resources of the Organization, and in collaboration with WHO.
- Use appropriate mechanisms to facilitate communication and information/experience exchange in food-borne disease surveillance among countries of the Region, as well as information about food-borne hazards.

Establishment of the Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA)

44. The Meeting considered document NERC/04/6 “Establishment of the Regional Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA)”. The Meeting further emphasized the need for inter-country cooperation and coordination in

disease monitoring, reporting and emergency response for improving animal health in the Region and control of trans-boundary animal diseases. The Meeting noted that the purpose of the document was to review legal aspects for establishing the Commission.

45. The Meeting took note of previous recommendations adopted by various technical and regional fora on creating an Animal Health Commission in the Region, particularly the 25th NERC held in 2000 in Beirut, which unanimously agreed to establish the said Commission.

46. The Meeting *appreciated* efforts exerted by FAO and its Regional Office for Near East in support of the establishment of AHCHNENA, particularly in hosting the Interim Secretariat within the FAO Regional Office; establishing an email list for AHCNENA, including chief veterinary officers, associated Regional Organizations, senior livestock specialists, as well as FAO and UNDP offices in the Region; development of the AHCHNENA website (<http://www.ahcna.net>); production, reproduction and distribution of FAO publications relevant to animal diseases; as well as organizing the 2nd Roundtable Meeting on Food and Mouth Disease (FMD), in October 2003 in Cairo.

47. The Meeting *appreciated* the offer extended by Kuwait to host and support the Commission, when established.

48. A number of delegates indicated their need to refer to further legal advice.

49. Following thorough discussion, the Meeting resolved to refer the “Agreement for Establishment of the Regional Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa” to the Ministerial segment of the Conference for final decision.

Report of the 3rd Session of Agriculture, Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East (ALAWUC)

50. The Meeting reviewed the Report of the Agriculture, Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East (ALAWUC), which met from 9 to 11 March 2004 in Doha, Qatar. Following thorough examination and discussion, the Meeting adopted the Report, after introducing some amendments.

III. OTHER MATTERS

A. Side Events

(i) Roundtable on Financing Agricultural Development in the Near East

51. The Meeting welcomed FAO’s initiative for holding, in cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank, the Roundtable Meeting for Financing Agricultural Development in the Near East as a side-event to the Regional Conference. The Roundtable aimed at spearheading the discussion on the need and importance of increasing financial flows towards agricultural development. The Meeting requested FAO to consider holding follow-up events to further discuss ways and means to promote

investment in agriculture, in collaboration with other partners-in-development and with the countries of the Region. (Annex F includes the Summary Report of the Roundtable).

(ii) Sub-regional Strategy for Food Security for North Africa

52. The Meeting took note of the side-event held on Sub-regional Strategy for Food Security for North Africa. The side-event was attended by Representatives of all member countries of the Sub-region. The side-event stressed the need and importance of continuing the technical collaboration between FAO and the Secretariat of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in formulating a Sub-regional Strategy and Programme for Food Security. It was agreed to continue the dialogue in that respect and FAO expressed its readiness to consider providing technical support for such process, as needed and requested. (Annex G includes more information on this side-event).

B. Desert Locust Control Efforts

53. The Meeting noted with appreciation, FAO efforts in combating desert locust, through its EMPRES programme. It **urged** donor countries to provide urgent support for control of desert locust and bird swarms in the Western Region.

C. Rural Digital Divide

54. The Meeting appreciated FAO's new programme for bridging the rural digital divide, and **invited** support for development of global partnerships to harness information and knowledge for enhancement of food security and poverty reduction, as well as human and institutional capacity building in this regard.

IV. CONCLUDING ITEMS

Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting

55. The Meeting adopted the Report following intensive discussions and introduction of some amendments.

Closure of the Senior Officers Meeting

56. Following short statements of thanks and appreciation by delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on behalf of all delegates, by the FAO Representative and by the Chairperson; the Meeting was declared closed at 18:00 hrs on 15 March, 2004.

**ROUNDTABLE
ON
FINANCING AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
IN THE NEAR EAST REGION**

Doha, State of Qatar, 15 March 2004

Jointly Organized by the Islamic Development Bank and FAO

Summary Report

Roundtable on Financing Agricultural Development in the Near East Region
27th FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC)
Doha, Qatar, 15 March 2004

1. The Roundtable on Financing Agricultural Development was held on 15 March, 2004 as a side-event to the 27th FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC), held during the period 13-17 March 2004, in Doha - Qatar. The Roundtable was jointly organized by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and FAO. The purpose of the Roundtable was to discuss means to mobilise financial resources to meet the needs of the Near East countries to achieve sustainable agricultural development and food security and to increase investment in agriculture. The meeting was attended by 56 participants from 14 countries and several regional and international financial and developmental agencies. Delegations from several member countries attended, including representatives from ministries of finance.
2. Three technical papers were presented. The first two papers were presented by FAO and discussed “*Trends and Issues in Financing Agricultural and Rural Development: World Experience*”, and the issue of “*Sustainable Agricultural Development Policies in the Near East Region: Challenges, Issues and Opportunities for Financing Agricultural Development*”, respectively. The third paper, which was presented by the Representative of the Islamic Development Bank, focused on “*Islamic Development Bank Financing of Agricultural projects: Opportunities and Constraints*”. Fruitful and lively discussions were held by the participants.
3. The Roundtable looked at the different types of external resources available; factors affecting domestic resource mobilisation and allocation; and constraints to channelling funds for investment by farmers themselves. It discussed also the issues of absorptive capacity constraints and the role that governments in the Region could play in addressing these issues. Constraints to increasing investment at all levels were discussed, while means to ensure that investment funds actually reach farmers were stressed. The negative impacts of export subsidies provided by developed countries and other forms of distortions at the national, regional and global levels on agricultural investment in developing countries were also emphasized.
4. The Meeting noted that despite significant progress made over the last decade by countries of the Near East region in overall economic growth, poverty and food insecurity were still widespread in many countries of the Region.
5. The Meeting recognized that the Region needs to improve competitiveness of its agricultural sector and that the availability of cheap labour, close proximity to potential export markets and a reasonable natural resource base provided an excellent opportunity to increase agricultural exports to regional and European markets. It underlined that the key to improving competitiveness was to invest in physical infrastructure, human capital, and research and technology, since public and private investments can raise returns for agricultural producers or lower agricultural costs of production.
6. The Meeting stressed that the Region faced a serious water problem (both quantity and quality), which called for improving both the productive and allocative

efficiency of water use, and formulation of clear statements of national water policy and national water resource management plans.

7. The Meeting was also convinced that hunger, or lack of access to adequate food, was one of the direst traits of poverty and that the concept of food security constituted an effective tool with which to target, design and monitor policies and initiatives for poverty reduction.

8. The Meeting noted that the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action adopted at the World Food Summit of 1996 and the *World Food Summit: five years later (WFS:fyl)* in June, 2002, brought to the fore the global commitment to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and to achieve sustainable food security for all people, and that this global commitment was further reaffirmed in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) following the Millennium Summit in 2000.

9. The Meeting observed that agriculture's contribution to economic growth and its role as a productive sector in the economy needed to be recognised and reflected in budgetary allocations. The Meeting also observed that agricultural growth had much more effect on poverty reduction than growth in other sectors.

10. It was also noted that although most investments were primarily mobilized by the farmers themselves, through their expenditures on agriculture, forestry and fisheries, the public sector played a critical role in providing incentives and creating an environment conducive to such investments as well as in ensuring sufficient availability of public goods (basic infrastructure, rule of law, peace and security);

11. The Meeting recognized in particular that mobilizing resources for agriculture is fundamental and must be supplemented by investment in infrastructure, education, health, safe drinking water, conflict reduction, good governance and market openness;

12. The Meeting was concerned that the role of government in support of economic activities in general, and agriculture in particular, has been scaled down over a decade due to financial crisis and reforms in most countries and that governments' allocations of public resources to agriculture remained well below the share of agriculture in income and employment generation;

13. It was recalled during the Meeting that government spending on productivity-enhancing investments and natural resources conservation, such as agricultural research and development, irrigation and rural infrastructure (including roads and electricity), had a significant impact on growth in agricultural productivity while also contributing to poverty reduction. The Meeting recognized that enabling small-scale farmers to face the challenges of globalization would require special attention to rural capacity, institution-building and safety nets, as well as efforts to improve rural infrastructure, including roads, communications, marketing, transport, storage and processing facilities as well as ecological protection;

14. The Meeting agreed that one of the major challenges now was to translate budgetary expenditure into effective delivery of services and support for the agricultural sector. It also agreed that it would be useful for countries of the Near East to share experiences in mobilising resources for agriculture and ways of achieving effective delivery.

15. The Meeting recognized the need to explore possibilities for tapping civil society and private-sector resources, both managerial and financial, to contribute to the provision of infrastructure and social services. This should be done in a way that promotes service quality, expands access to the poorest, in particular to women, and at the same time maximizes the levels of public resources allocated to the provision of other non-commercial services, including safety nets, that are required to establish more just and equitable societies.
16. The Roundtable agreed that the most important issue in financing agriculture was to ensure that investment funds reach the farmers themselves. Also, the options for providing rural finance were discussed and all countries were **called upon** to facilitate access to finance by small and medium-sized enterprises through the provision of credit - particularly micro-credit and appropriate guarantee schemes.
17. The meeting **called upon** ministries of agriculture to work more closely with ministries of finance.
18. The Roundtable emphasised that financing institutions and development partners should streamline their own procedures in project processing, procurement, disbursement, and monitoring. The Meeting also stressed the need for closer collaboration among all parties concerned in the formulation of agricultural development and food security related projects, and that such collaboration should start from the early stages of project identification and formulation, including the possibility of joint formulation missions.
19. The Meeting stressed the usefulness of FAO support in the formulation of country and regional agricultural development and food security strategies and programmes commissioned by financing institutions and regional organizations.
20. The discussion identified the investment priorities in the Region to include: 1) future priority for investment in the water sector should follow a three-prong policy of water demand management, improving environmental water quality, and selected interventions in supply enhancement; 2) infrastructure for trade facilitation; 3) focus should be given to agricultural support services provided mainly by the private sector, with an important role for the government as a facilitator and provider of an enabling environment; and 4) establishment of a conducive policy environment including macro stability to reduce uncertainty surrounding investment; promotion of markets and to free relative prices to raise profitability of investment; implementation of a well-defined and effectively enforced code of property rights that would lower the cost of doing business; and promotion of adequate political institutions to foster social consensus and political stability.
21. The Meeting was convinced that there could be no hope of meeting the WFS target if the political will to direct sufficient resources to hunger reduction was not strengthened, and unless the resources required to put an end to hunger did exist.
22. The Meeting agreed that revitalizing the agricultural sector, including livestock, forestry and fisheries, required investment in crucial public goods and the creation of enabling conditions for private sector participation. Also, attention should be made in that regard to human capacity development, scientific research and technology transfer and other elements crucial to agricultural development in addition to combating constraints to

agricultural productivity and efficient marketing, such as soil infertility, poor water management, inadequate infrastructure, pests and diseases.

23. The Meeting called upon countries of the Region to implement, as an urgent matter, policies and measures for agricultural and rural development, by mobilizing adequate resources for these sectors commensurate with their respective contributions to the national economy and capacity to contribute to reducing poverty, hunger and food insecurity. The commitments made previously by member countries of the Near East Region through other forums and initiatives (such as the NEPAD for the African/Near East countries) to increase investment in agriculture and rural development was noted.

24. The Meeting also agreed that all efforts should be made by all concerned to enhance consultations at national and regional levels with civil society organizations and other key stakeholders, including the private sector, women and youth associations, etc., aimed at promoting their active participation in all aspects of agricultural development and food production;

25. The meeting also called upon the member countries to intensify cooperation with FAO and development partners, including regional and international development banks, noting with appreciation the positive role they have played over the past years in support of agriculture and food security.

26. The Meeting highly commended FAO and the Islamic Development Bank for holding such roundtable, and **requested** FAO to consider holding follow up consultations/meetings with member countries and concerned financial institutes and partners-in-development to further spearhead the dialogue on related issues of financing agricultural development.

27. The Meeting **requested** FAO to consider the inclusion of financing agricultural development as a topic for discussion, or holding an additional follow up side-event on the subject during the next FAO Regional Conference for the Near East.

**SIDE-MEETING
ON
SUB-REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD SECURITY FOR NORTH AFRICA**

Doha, State of Qatar, 15 March 2004

Summary Report

Sub-Regional Strategy for Sustainable Agricultural Development and Food Security for North Africa

Doha, Qatar, 15 March 2004

1. A side-meeting was held to discuss the sub-regional strategy and programme for food security for North Africa. The meeting was attended by representatives from member countries of the sub-region (Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania) in addition to FAO Officers concerned from the Regional and sub-regional Offices. The Meeting reviewed FAO efforts to support countries of the Region in developing National Strategies for Food Security as well as regional/Sub-regional strategies and Programmes for Food Security to support member countries in achieving the food security goal through specific actions complementing the national efforts. FAO efforts with other regional economic organizations in the Region (CAEU and ECO) were reviewed and discussed. The elements of the strategic frame and envisaged technical assistance prepared earlier by the Secretariat of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in collaboration with FAO was outlined and discussed.

2. The Meeting was briefed on the recently signed Protocol/Agreement between FAO and the Secretary of the AMU, and the on-going technical committee meetings of the AMU Secretariat. The Meeting agreed that representatives of the member countries attending this side-meeting would report to their governments on the relevance of the draft prepared by the Secretariat in collaboration with FAO. It also agreed to request the discussion of the draft through the AMU Committee for Food Security that would meet during the third quarter of 2004. The FAO Sub-regional Office in Tunisia would follow up this matter with the AMU Secretariat and member countries as appropriate. The representative of the host country for the above mentioned AMU Committee indicated the willingness to include the draft as a discussion item during this meeting. FAO (RNE/SNE) stands ready to provide technical support for further discussion on the formulation of such project document, as needed.