



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

STATEMENT

BY

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COMMISSIONER FOR RURAL ECONOMY AND AGRICULTURE
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

(On behalf H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission)

AT

**THE 31ST SESSION OF FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR
AFRICA**

MINISTERIAL SESSION

Held via Video Link

27 October 2020

9.00 GMT

Excellency the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security;

Excellency the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

Excellency QU Dongyu, FAO Director-General;

Excellency the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council;

Excellency the Chairperson of the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Africa;

Honourable Ministers in Attendance;

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen;

All Protocol Observed.

I feel honoured to represent the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, and to address this Ministerial Session of the 31st FAO Regional Conference for Africa under the theme “*Promoting Inclusive Agribusiness and Regional Integration for the Attainment of the SDGs*”. I convey to you the Chairperson’s profound gratitude for the invitation, but also his apology for not being able to attend the Conference in person due to other competing engagements.

Greetings to you all, Excellences and Honourable Ministers! It is my sincere hope that you are all managing well amid the difficult circumstances which the Covid-19 pandemic has been dictating since mid-March this year.

It is fulfilling that we are able to meet virtually and continue with the business we agreed in the last FAO ARC that took place in Khartoum, Sudan, from 19th to 23rd February 2018. That conference, among others, discussed the major challenges facing our continent, including the multiple burdens of malnutrition, rising food demand caused by trends such as rapid population growth, and urbanization. Since then new challenges emerged, notably the outbreak of fall armyworm, desert locust, Covid-19 and flooding in parts of our

continent for the last two years. Of course, sporadic conflicts and civil unrest are another migraine headache, as well as heartache.

Having gone through the agenda of this conference, I am pleased to note that these new challenges are tabled for discussion. But, I am satisfied to note that new areas for intervention and addressing these challenges have also been included. New initiatives such as “*Innovation and Digitalization for Inclusive Agriculture and Food Systems Transformation*” and the “*FAO’s Hand-in-Hand Initiative to Combat Poverty and Hunger*”, are highly welcome. To my mind this is a befitting business unusual, for we can no longer afford to dwell on the same way of doing things amid mounting challenges threatening to plunge our populations deeper into misery, poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

I am also pleased to note that this conference is building on our joint efforts guided by two ministerial conferences, which took place in April and July this year, to address the effects of the pandemic combined with environmental effects and held under the auspices of the AU Specialized Technical Committees on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment. Furthermore, I am pleased to report that collaboration with FAO has grown even stronger as we stood together in solidarity to lead a multi-stakeholder response to the pandemic guided by the two ministerial declarations and co-leading the Joint Task Force in response to the situation. It is noteworthy that for the last five months the five work streams of the Joint Task Force have been meeting regularly to review progress against their respective actions plans.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I find the theme of this thirty-first Conference of “*promoting inclusive agribusiness*” befitting, as well as appealing to me personally. It sits well with the reality that we have woken up to after the break of the pandemic. Indeed, we have now been reminded to look into what we have and how to cope with it when movement is no longer at our disposal, and when incomes have shrunk. The 16th April 2020 Conference of African Ministers of Agriculture called for open borders to allow unhindered movement of food commodities, and also, ensuring adequate emergency strategic food reserves and storage facilities. Obviously, this can only be enabled by boosting and catalysing the private sector to invest

heavily, but sustainably, in agribusiness. The Joint Conference of African ministers responsible for agriculture, trade and finance “Ministerial Declaration and Call for Action”, *inter alia*, recommends, and I quote: “*support a vibrant private sector to access affordable finance to create businesses and quality jobs that are necessary for an inclusive and sustainable pathway towards recovery from the pandemic.*” Also recommended, is “*to promote innovation and digital agriculture to accelerate food systems transformation across the whole value chain*”.

This clearly shows that the path for our next collaboration has been paved for us. The onus is, therefore, upon us to put our act together, as partners supporting our Member State Governments to articulate a set of new strategies that speak to these identified priorities. It is based on these new pathways and priorities that this conference draws its relevance.

Personally, I have undertaken to support initiatives in these identified areas. Agriculture development would be a wild goose without pursuing an agenda of promoting and investing in an inclusive agribusiness. As you may be aware, since last year we have been collaborating with FAO Regional Office for Africa in developing two initiatives, both of which are tailored to the new recommended areas of intervention. One of these is the Sustainable Agriculture Mechanization in Africa (SAMA) Framework, which could have been rolled out had the Covid-19 outbreak not taken its toll. The SAMA will inform the implementation of a programme for empowering women agricultural producers through procurement and distribution of mechanized farming equipment. The second initiative is on promoting and supporting digital agriculture. It is my hope that these initiatives will gain strong buy-in and support by our Member States.

Excellences, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I look forward to yet another fruitful engagement and concrete outcomes.

I respectfully submit.

Thank you, obrigada, merci, asante sana, shukran.