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منظمة  
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للأمم المتحدة

# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

## Thirty-fourth Session

Nadi, Fiji, 9-13 April 2018

## Statement by the Director-General

It is an honour and great pleasure to be with you for this 34th (Thirty-fourth) Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific.

This is the second time that the Regional Conference has been held in a Pacific Island country.

The first one was in Samoa in 1996, more than 20 years ago. And it is very important that SIDS countries have their voice heard loud and clear.

SIDS and especially the Pacific Islands are the countries most vulnerable to the main challenge of our time: climate change.

Today, in the face of climate change, natural disasters and extreme weather events are more likely to happen, and yet more difficult to predict.

Droughts and floods are more frequent and intense. We saw this happen over the last 10 days here in Fiji.

Cyclone Josie was provoked death, heavy flooding and destruction. And less than 10 days later, cyclone Keni contributed to cause more damage and disruption.

Climate change will likely continue to bring uncertainty and complexities, and affect every aspect of our lives. This is what we call “the new normal”.

And in the case of SIDS, adaptation to climate change and resilience to natural disasters is a more than vital condition to achieve sustainable development. It is a matter of survival.

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*Ladies and gentlemen,*

This Regional Conference is very important to further align FAO's work to the needs of Asian and Pacific countries in light of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

FAO's highest priority is to support countries to achieve the SDG 2 on ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture development.

Unfortunately, as you know, the latest numbers show that hunger increased in the world in 2016, after more than 10 years of decline.

This also happened here in Asia and the Pacific.

This region has made remarkable progress in reducing undernourishment over the two decades, from 17 percent to 11 percent of the population.

But there has been a slowdown in progress in recent years, and the number of hungry people have increased in some areas, especially in Southeast Asia.

Today, there are still nearly 490 million undernourished people in Asia and the Pacific, far more than any other part of the world.

Countries need to step up their efforts to bring the fight against hunger back on track.

For that, it is crucial to build the resilience of family farmers and rural communities, where poverty and hunger are still concentrated.

The implementation and reinforcement of social protection systems and climate-smart agriculture practices are fundamental in this sense.

Let me highlight that hunger must not be our only concern. In fact, the SDG 2 calls for the eradication of all forms of malnutrition by 2030.

Today we are facing a global epidemic of overweight and obesity. The numbers are growing in most developing and developed countries alike.

In 2016, more than 1.9 billion adults in the world were overweight. Of these, over 650 million were obese.

The situation in the Pacific Islands is alarming. We find here highest rates of obesity in the world.

In at least 10 Pacific island countries, more than 50 percent (and in some up to 90 percent) of the population is overweight, according to World Health Organization (WHO).

Obesity prevalence ranges from more than 30 percent here in Fiji to an incredible 80 percent among women in American Samoa (figures from WHO).

The overconsumption of processed foods high in salt and sugars is the major driver behind this increase in overweight and obesity.

Urbanization is another challenge to meet.

Countries need to tackle this situation by stimulating healthy diets.

National public policies are fundamental. Nutrition is a public issue, and everyone's responsibility.

Consumers must be aware of the benefits and detriments of what they are eating.

This involves nutrition education, awareness raising, as well as regulations on labelling and advertisements.

I will explore more on these topics during the Ministerial Roundtable on Zero Hunger. I invite all of you to participate.

*Excellencies,*

As I mentioned before, climate change is one of the major obstacles in achieving sustainable development.

It is of utmost importance to promote the adaptation of food systems, especially in relation to poor rural communities.

We expect to hear from you on how FAO can best help your countries in planning and implementing actions, as well as in mobilizing financial support to build resilience of rural livelihoods.

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is one of the mechanisms now available to finance developing countries in relation to climate change.

FAO is working closely with a wide range of countries around the world that have formally requested the Organization's assistance to present projects to the fund.

Here in Asia and the Pacific, FAO is currently supporting countries in the elaboration of 12 projects to be submitted to the Green Climate Fund.

We are expecting to present 3 of them to the Fund by the end of 2018. These 3 projects are related to Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines.

They are about promoting resilience building and adaptation to climate change.

In the Pacific sub-region, FAO is working in the elaboration of other five projects, involving the following countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Samoa and Solomon Islands.

So there is lot of work going under way. And FAO will continue to support all countries that wish to have access to the Green Climate Fund.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

FAO is looking to strengthen and forge new partnerships with regional and sub-regional bodies in Asia and the Pacific. Working together is crucial. This includes South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

In relation to SIDS, the Global Action Programme on Food Security and Nutrition (GAP) is very important to ensure that global and regional policy processes will meet the needs and priorities of SIDS.

I call upon international and regional partners to work together with the SIDS to implement the GAP, and where possible contribute with financial and technical support.

I am confident that with the ownership, commitment and cooperation of all involved, the GAP will successfully achieve the expected outcomes.

Let me conclude by saying there are still many challenges ahead. But with steadfast commitment, countries can deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is very important to have your feedback in relation to the four regional initiatives ongoing here in Asia and the Pacific, and also to the priorities for the years to come.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that FAO will continue to support the region to deliver the ambition of inclusive growth and shared prosperity for all.

No one can be left behind in our common quest for sustainable development.

Thank you for your attention.