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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

**Thirty-fifth Session**

**21-22 September 2020<sup>1</sup>**

**Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on  
World Food Security (CFS)**

<sup>1</sup> Rescheduled from 2-4 March, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

- **Welcome address**
  - Chairperson, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Secretary, ladies and gentlemen,
  - I am honoured to be here with you today, as Chair of the Committee on World Food Security, to address this FAO Regional Conference and to tell you about the most recent accomplishments of CFS and inform you of the activities that we will undertake in the upcoming months.
  
- **COVID-19 pandemic: implications for food security and nutrition**
  - We are living in extraordinary times. A mere few months earlier, none of us would have imagined that we would be where we are today. COVID-19 has changed our life, as we know it.
  - Apart from the health challenges, the pandemic has also caused great harm to the global hunger situation. Even before COVID-19, the 2019 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report showed that over 820 million people were hungry. All indications are that this number is now rising significantly, affecting millions more in every region. This is extremely concerning.
  - COVID-19 has also added to other pre-existing challenges like climate change, desert locust invasions, and conflicts.
  - Unfortunately, it is the poor, those already struggling with diet-related illnesses, and the most economically vulnerable who have been the most affected, and they still are.
  - CFS is concerned that these new trends might lead to a new food crisis, and further impair the achievement of SDG-2 and other related targets of the 2030 Agenda.
  - We must take urgent action to transform our food systems. The world needs sustainable food systems to deliver nutritious foods, for healthy diets, for a healthy planet.
  
- **Brief history of CFS**
  - Perhaps not many of you know of the genesis of CFS. The Committee was established in 1974, in response to the devastating famine in Bangladesh, which focused international attention on the topic, and prompted ambitious declarations that such tragedies would not re-occur. In that year, the very first “World Food Conference” met in Rome at FAO and, to back up its commitments, the international community agreed to create the CFS, as well as IFAD, and the CGIAR system, with the goal that “every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition”.

- **The CFS Reform: three strategic objectives**

- For 35 years, CFS kept a close eye on current and prospective supply/demand and food stock positions, disseminating timely updates to the global community to assure the adequacy of global food stocks.
- However, following another food crisis, the food price shocks of 2007-2008, CFS was reformed to be better equipped to address the serious problems around food security, and Members – you - agreed in 2009 to a massive overhaul of the Committee, broadening its ownership to the three Rome-based UN agencies, expanding it to become a multistakeholder platform - to include civil society, private sector, and other key development actors -, and creating a High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) to provide science and knowledge to inform its deliberations and decision-making.
- This new CFS has three main interlinked strategic objectives, which help channel CFS energy and resources towards activities that effectively respond to the needs of the food insecure and malnourished people.
- First: CFS wants to be the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform to discuss the FSN situation and coordinate collective action at all levels.
- Second: CFS has been reformed to develop voluntary global policy guidance for policy convergence and coherence to achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote the progressive realization of the right to adequate food.
- Third: CFS wants to foster the uptake, follow-up and review, and sharing of experiences and best practices on the use and application of CFS policy guidance at all levels.

- **CFS achievements and its current Programme of Work**

- Since it was reformed, CFS has already achieved some striking accomplishments by promulgating the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security (the *VGGTs*); the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (*RAI principles*); a Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crisis, and 14 sets of policy recommendations and HLPE reports on a wide array of relevant topics.

These products are providing developed and developing countries with effective instruments for combating hunger and malnutrition. If you do not know them, please talk to me or to the CFS Secretariat, I am sure that you will find something of interest to you and that could be helpful to your country!

- In October, last year, CFS 46 approved a new Multi-Year Programme of Work for 2020-2023 with four new workstreams on gender, youth, inequalities, and data systems. The programme of work was negotiated by CFS members and participants, balancing competing interests while carefully addressing legitimate workload concerns and costs.
- This year CFS is addressing two topics, with two new major policy products expected to be negotiated during 2020 and 2021, and presented to Members for endorsement at CFS 47 in February 2021: “Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches” and “Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems for Nutrition”.
- **CFS for you**
  - As you can see, our work programme is dense but it tackles challenging issues that require global solutions. If we want these inclusive processes of CFS to generate policy recommendations with the strongest possible legitimacy and the highest level of impact, we need all Members, and all stakeholders, to participate actively and constructively. We must add value to the debates, take full ownership of the outcomes, and make every effort to implement the policy recommendations produced by CFS, particularly as they pertain to ALL of US.
  - This is my message for you today. I am here to make an appeal to each of you to reach out to those that are not here, at all levels, and to help me spread the voice with them about the work of CFS and the tremendous impact that we can achieve only by working together.
  - Ministers, colleagues, we all agree that achieving food security and sustainable food systems is a matter of the greatest urgency. Even more so, after the coronavirus pandemic has exposed the vulnerability and weaknesses of already fragile global food systems. What I wish to do here is to let you know that the Committee on World Food Security exists to support you on the road ahead to reaching SDG 2 and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
  - I hope to see all of you in Rome at the next session of the Committee on World Food Security to continue this conversation. Together we MUST build back better. Thank you.