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Продовольственная и
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Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

Chairperson,

Honourable Ministers,

Director-General and

Distinguished Delegates,

1. It is an honour and pleasure for me to participate in the 33rd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe, and to address this meeting in my role as the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council. Before sharing some thoughts, please allow me to convey my appreciation to the Government and people of Poland for the excellent organization of this session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe, and of course, for your warm hospitality in your beautiful country.

2. Hunger and food insecurity are the first and foremost biggest challenges we are facing today. Our world is changing quickly around us. Innovations spring up daily like seedlings in spring, but this expansion is not without consequence. Despite this progress, more than 800 million people live in hunger, 3 billion do not have access to safe, affordable and nutritious food, and 2 billion suffer from nutrition-related diseases. The dots no longer connect; one-third of food produced globally is wasted while children are still hungry. And let us not forget that we will have to feed 10 billion people by 2050, for which an increase in sustainable agriculture production is needed.

3. While countries recover from the severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity, malnutrition and rural poverty, we are now confronted with another global crisis due to the war in Ukraine. The war has caused extensive loss of life and damage in key population centres, spread across rural areas, and sparked massive displacement. More than 3.6 million people have been forced to abandon their homes and flee across borders to safety. Millions more are internally displaced. It is clear that the war has resulted in a massive and deteriorating food security challenge, disrupted livelihoods during the agricultural growing season in Ukraine and also affected global food security.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

My thoughts and condolences go to all those families who have lost beloved ones and are hurt by the war.

4. The Council, at its 169th Session, demanded the immediate cessation of the use of force against Ukraine, including the targeting of civilians, and civilian food supplies and agricultural infrastructure, and the further aggravation of world food insecurity. The Council also expressed the gravest concern about the impact of the conflict on increased food insecurity globally, as Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the region as a whole, is one of the world's most important areas for grain, oilseed and other agriculture exports, when millions of people in several regions of the world are already facing either hunger, the immediate risk of hunger or are experiencing severe food insecurity.

5. It also stressed the role of FAO, in coordination and collaboration with other United Nations entities and relevant bodies, especially the Rome-based Agencies and international financial institutions, to address within its mandate the consequences of the conflict within Ukraine and on world food security and agriculture.

6. This war, and other conflicts and wars in many regions are causing unbelievable human suffering, food insecurity and the migration of millions of people. Food prices are spiking and developing countries are hit hardest once again. With the war in Ukraine we are facing rapidly rising consumer prices which are endangering global wheat and corn supplies, and sending fuel prices soaring. Again, the most vulnerable developing countries are hit hardest.

7. That is why we need to address the crises that fall within FAO's mandate. Every effort should be made to keep international trade in food and fertilizers open to meet domestic and global demand. Supply chains should be kept fully operational, including by protecting standing crops, livestock, food processing infrastructure and all logistical systems.

8. In order to absorb conflict-induced shocks and remain resilient, countries that depend on food imports from Ukraine and the Russian Federation will need to find alternative export suppliers for their food needs. To ensure the functioning of the international markets, transparency and policy dialogue should be strengthened as they play key roles when agricultural commodity markets are under uncertainty and disruptions need to be minimized.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. Over the last couple of years, we have seen many positive developments in your region. We have seen many initiatives and actions in transforming your agrifood systems to become more sustainable. I would like to applaud your region for addressing food loss; you are investing in processing techniques, rural road and electricity infrastructure, and the modernisation of value chains and markets. With this, other regions can learn from your efforts. In this respect, the promotion of food safety standards also remains crucial, of course.

10. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how crucial it is to work with a systemic and integrated approach. The FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme provided a comprehensive and coordinated approach to deal with the challenge, initially focusing on information and impact assessment to inform policy, advocacy and country programming, and to prevent the health crisis from becoming a food crisis.

11. I would like to compliment your region for actively promoting healthier diets and countering overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases. Most of your countries are increasingly conscious of the need to create healthier food environments for healthier diets and to empower consumers in this respect. Mainstreaming nutrition across sectoral policies is essential here. Governments in a growing number of countries are employing a range of tools to achieve this, such as food-based dietary guidelines. Given also the threats due to phytosanitary and animal health threats, the implementation of a One Health approach remains of eminent importance. I am pleased to see that your region is such a great supporter of the One Health approach and international cooperation in this regard.

12. Science and innovation, including new digital tools and technologies, offer an opportunity for addressing the challenges of your region, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative taken for establishing the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture, which was adopted by the FAO Council and Conference, is an excellent example of leading the way.

13. For the challenges facing the region, the role of innovation and technology as accelerators is pivotal in supporting the shift to more sustainable agrifood systems. Scaling up these initiatives is indeed a priority. Certainly, innovation can boost this. The development of the FAO Strategy on Science and Innovation is directed to responding to urgent needs, globally and in your region, to accelerate agricultural productivity and sustainability. That is also why your input in the development of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy is so important and why it is crucial to adopt the strategy at the Council Session in June this year.

14. We can produce more food than ever, but biodiversity and the amount of arable land are decreasing. There is a clear need for a more systemic and coordinated approach among key sectors and stakeholders for the sustainable management of forests, and biodiversity for food and agriculture in your region. I compliment you on the already existing initiatives in this regard. We can learn from these and you have to bring them to scale.

15. This is also the case with regards to climate change. FAO assists countries to manage their natural resources sustainably, while also coping with climate change and reducing the risk of disasters affecting agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Emphasis is given to addressing the degradation of natural resources as well as an understanding that radical changes are needed in the interaction between agriculture and the environment, moving from agriculture as a cause of degradation to a situation where agriculture becomes a central part of the solution towards a more sustainable future. I applaud your region for the emphasis given to addressing climate change. That is why your input on the FAO Strategy on Climate Change is so important, and I am confident that we can adopt this strategy as well at the Council Session in June.

16. It is also clear that the shortcomings of our global agrifood system have been laid bare. We need transformative change, and we need it now. There are no excuses anymore for not acting. Sustainable agrifood systems are and should be part of the solution.

17. The lessons learned from FAO's implementation of programmes in the region will emphasize the implications for supporting transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*, leaving no one behind.

18. FAO is needed now more than ever before to achieve its most noble mandate, and our joint efforts should continue to be directed towards transforming agrifood systems in the region. All stakeholders have to take their respective responsibilities and work together towards the achievement of FAO's goals as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda.

19. It is unequivocal that to achieve the SDGs by 2030, agrifood systems must benefit from urgent action to address rapidly increasing diet-related health concerns, damage to ecosystems and the threat of climate change.

20. Allow me to recall the strong momentum created by the UN Food Systems Summit 2021: countries in your region affirmed their commitments to move towards more inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems. The leading role of FAO was also highlighted during this event. In this regard, we should be proud that FAO is hosting the Coordination Hub to provide coordination for the follow-up actions as well as to potentially leverage key partnerships in the wider ecosystem of support.

21. I would like to compliment your region for addressing key priorities and challenges of the region through the following Regional Initiatives: i) empowering smallholders, family farms and youth through inclusive rural transformation, digitalization and innovation (RI-1); ii) transforming food systems and facilitating market access and integration (RI-2); and iii) managing natural resources sustainably and preserving biodiversity in a changing climate (RI-3).

22. These Regional Initiatives function as the programmatic umbrella to translate FAO's specialised expertise in integrated multidisciplinary interventions tailored to the regional, subregional, and country levels, facilitating greater impact of FAO's work on the key priorities in each region under the results framework for the biennium, as presented in the Updated Results Framework 2020-21.¹

23. The efforts made by your region should continue, and I also encourage the region to continue supporting the implementation of FAO corporate initiatives such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and the Regional Technical Platform on Green Agriculture.² These initiatives aim to reduce the vulnerabilities of the rural poor through improved agrifood systems capacities using FAO's data tools.

24. Of course, the proof of the pudding is in the eating i.e. relying on the means of implementation. In this regard, your emphasis on the role of the private sector, in particular the food industries, is crucial in making the region's agrifood systems more sustainable, more resilient, more inclusive and more efficient to provide better nutrition for all.

25. Partnerships are crucial in this respect. I compliment you for enhancing national and regional capacities, and establishing collaborations and partnerships with regional organizations and institutions, including the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in Southeast Europe, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Slow Food, and the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) as well as with regional technical networks (such as the Agricultural Trade Expert Network in Europe and Central Asia and LANDNET, the network of land tenure professionals working with land consolidation, land banking and land market development in Europe and Central Asia).

26. Last but not least, women and youth are key actors in agrifood systems. Young women and men can be catalysts for economic growth and development in rural economies. However, there are still gaps in understanding the specific economic, social and cultural issues that affect their aspirations, livelihoods, well-being and integration into local economies. They also have the potential to be active agents of change and resilience builders. Acknowledging the crucial role of women and youth is of utmost importance for your future and is the first step, but everything depends on how you will make this concrete.

Chairperson,

Honourable Ministers,

Director-General and

Distinguished Delegates,

27. To conclude, this Regional Conference for Europe has a unique role to play in helping define FAO policies, and I firmly believe that the continuing engagement and commitment of the governments in this region will do much to ensure that FAO continues to serve you well and is an effective agent in the struggle to free the world of hunger and malnutrition, leaving no one behind.

¹ FAO. 2021. Web Annex 2: *Updated Results Framework 2020-21 – Strategic and Functional Objectives* (Revised). <https://www.fao.org/3/nd023en/nd023en.pdf>

² 2 FAO. 2022. *Regional Technical Platform on Green Agriculture*. In: FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia [online]. <https://www.fao.org/europe/knowledgesharing/greenagricultureplatform/en/>