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Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Organisation des Nations
Unies pour l'alimentation
et l'agriculture

Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

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Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Organizations

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ministers,

Heads of Delegation,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet today at a critical juncture, facing a storm of challenges, ranging from climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic to conflicts and crises impacting countries of the region (Yemen, Syrian Arab Republic, Sudan, Gaza, etc.) and threatening their food security and requiring tangible intervention with a sound scientific basis. We come together not only as civil society organizations but as a group of human beings deeply concerned about threat of hunger and the challenges facing agrifood systems in the region; challenges which continue to exceed all limits and affect us all.

1. In response to the growing need for enhanced cooperation between civil society and international organizations to achieve food security and sustainable development in the agrifood sectors, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has facilitated the formation of a steering committee composed of the Egyptian Food Bank, the Maghrebian and North African Farmers Union (UMNAGRI), the Omani Agricultural Association and the Arab Society for Plant Protection.
2. The steering committee was characterized by its representation of civil society in the Near East and North Africa, as well as the scientific and academic community. The Egyptian Food Bank was mandated to chair and host this year's consultations in Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt.
3. I am honoured on behalf of the civil society in the region to present today the outputs of the civil society consultations that were held in January 2024.
4. The steering committee developed a unique, participatory methodology to reach comprehensive and replicable programme designs. It focused on linking consultations with the strategic priorities of the region and started where the outputs of previous consultations ended.
5. The steering committee led a two-day intensive workshop entitled "Actionable Strategies for Sustainable Agri-Food Systems in the Near East and North Africa" as an integral part of the

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC 37) that brings us together today. This year, we put our minds together again and chose to focus on actions: focused, flexible, practical and responsible actions.

Consultations focused on addressing the four priorities of the Food and Agriculture Organization endorsed by NERC 36 and aligning with its Strategic Framework announced by the organization in 2022: Rural transformation and inclusive value chains, healthy diets for all, greening agriculture and building resilience to multiple shocks, crises and protracted disasters directly affecting five countries and impacting all countries in the region.

6. This statement, which is a summary from the detailed report that will include the outcomes of the civil society consultation meeting, represents our collective voice.

7. The meeting was attended by representatives of civil society in the countries of the region to convey the voices of the millions they serve through their organizations that serve small farmers and advocate for the cause of food security, identifying problems and prioritizing from the perspective of the stakeholders in our work - the people we serve - to developing strong logical frameworks ready for implementation.

8. Despite the diversity of the discussions and backgrounds, all groups independently called for the imperative to continue this constructive discussion in the workshops over two days.

9. Proposed Civil Society Initiatives

- First: Establish a permanent platform for coordination and learning, uniting us as organizations working in the field of food and agriculture, and serving as a space that enables us to work and learn from each other and implement on the ground; a platform that promotes evidence-based programme design, learning, communication and continuous support.
- Second: Launch an initiative to conserve seeds and genetic resources. Recognizing the importance of biodiversity and traditional knowledge, we will collaborate with local communities, research institutions and government agencies to document, conserve and promote the use of native seeds, ensuring the sustainability and resilience of our agrifood systems.
- Third: Launch a regional accelerator for agricultural technologies facilitated by civil society organizations with the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization and governments, to attract the best minds in the region, providing them with the resources and support they need to transform their innovative ideas into a practical reality that serves small farmers and family farming.

10. On behalf of the steering committee and the civil society, we will work to achieve our collective vision before we meet again, in two years. As we move forward, let us remember that our strength lies in our unity and commitment to working together. Governments, the private sector, civil society organizations and individuals together, we can build a world where no one is left hungry, where innovation drives progress and where every voice is heard and valued.

11. Recommendations for Ministers and Heads of Governmental Institutions

- To put in place mechanisms to support the networking of the digital platform with the government and stakeholders from the civil society and academic sectors to ensure the development and effective use of the platform.
- To develop policies and a legal framework to promote the use of digital technology in agrifood systems, including encouraging innovation and investment in modern agricultural technology.
- To activate national and regional measures that support the preservation of the native seeds.
- To allocate financial and technical resources to support the initiative to preserve native seeds, including providing the necessary training and guidance to local communities, research institutes and government institutions.

- To encourage scientific minds and students interested in finding technology and innovative solutions for agriculture and support them to promote innovation in the agricultural field among future generations.
- To develop flexible strategies that enhance resilience of agriculture sector and the resilience of vulnerable communities, especially during economic crises.
- To consider the agricultural sector (including crop, livestock and fisheries) as one of the strategic priorities of countries, their economic, social and political security, and make rural development a priority in national and regional policies.
- To defend food systems that rely on national and regional capabilities within the concept of comprehensive food sovereignty and promote the cultivation of basic food crops, such as wheat, and develop investment plans for unexploited agricultural land in the Arab region to increase production.

12. Recommendations for the Food and Agriculture Organization

- To establish a support system for the development and implementation of national and regional action plans with the participation of regional and national offices.
- To continue the provision and strengthening of technical support to raise awareness on the importance of conserving native seeds among small farmers.
- To strengthen the provision of technical support and help mobilize the necessary resources to secure the development, operation and promotion of the regional agricultural technology accelerator.
- To strengthen strategic partnerships with stakeholders in the agricultural sector in the region, including governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to ensure sustainable support and the success of the regional accelerator.
- To provide technical support and help mobilize the necessary resources to implement the three projects effectively.
- To facilitate the mobilization of funding to help countries face disasters and crises to achieve food security.
- To help provide financial support to help small farmers face disasters and crises.
- To provide agricultural advisory services, with emphasis on the use of pesticides and fertilizers and the rationalization of water use.

13. As I approach the end of this statement, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) represented by its Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa for promoting this collaboration and providing the vital resources for our work together.