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**Statement by the Chairperson of the 36th Session of the Regional
Conference for Asia and the Pacific**

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*Respected Chair of the 37th APRC, Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Government of Sri Lanka
Distinguished Director General of the FAO, Mr Qu Dongyu*

Honourable Ministers of Agriculture and Food from Asia and the Pacific region

Excellencies,

Senior officials from the host government and the officials of member countries

Representatives from different private sector, international and civil society organizations, media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and very good morning.

1. It is indeed an immense pleasure and privilege to be here in Colombo in the Ministerial Meeting of the 37th APRC. I take this opportunity to join you in my maiden visit after taking over the charge of the Ministry of Agriculture in the Government of Bangladesh in this January. I have found this forum a great opportunity to jointly address the challenges of food and nutrition security in Asia and the Pacific Region. I would like to thank the FAO and Sri Lankan government for inviting me to attend this important event.

2. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the chair of the 37th APRC, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Amaraweera, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Plantation Industries, Government of Sri Lanka. I am confident that regional cooperation in food and nutrition security through FAO will reach to a new height against production and distributional challenges under your dynamic leadership.

Excellencies,

3. On this occasion, let me recall the events of the 36th APRC that was held in Dhaka during 8-11 March 2022. It was although a very difficult task under the pandemic situation, the Ministry of Agriculture of Bangladesh had been able to successfully organize the event in advice and guidance of honourable Prime Minister of Government of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina and with whole hearted support from the FAO and its member countries.

Distinguished Delegates,

4. As a farmer turned politician, I have experienced the challenges of better production for food and nutrition security of increasing population against the backdrop of climate change and other environmental and economic stresses. More importantly, as a lifelong student of management and now as a manager of agriculture sector, I have also experienced the distributional challenges and export restrictions that become very critical for food insecure countries. The standards and non-tariff barriers are also critical for food producing low-income countries who have potential for export of their agricultural produce to buy other necessities.

5. Let me share with you that despite multifarious challenges including climate change, Bangladesh has achieved self-sufficiency in food production, especially in rice production. In the global scale of food production, we are reportedly 2nd in jute production, 3rd in rice, vegetable and onion production, 7th in potato and mango. According to FAO report 'The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022', Bangladesh ranked 3rd in inland open water capture production and 5th in world aquaculture production. Moreover, Bangladesh ranked 1st among 11 Hilsa producing countries in the world and ranked 4th in Tilapia production in the world and 3rd in Asia. We are self-sufficient in meat, fish and egg production. This progress has been made possible with the innovation, extension, and mechanization of agriculture. However, due to lack of storage and well-developed value chain our agricultural produces see a huge post-harvest loss.

6. The production of vegetables, fruits, fish and other products has made our export basket diversified; however, we also import a huge quantity of wheat, edible oil, sugar and cotton. This has put pressure on our foreign currency reserves, in the context of price hike of agricultural inputs, such as fertilizer and fuel and food items due to global instability. The export restriction in some cases also put us in challenges of managing food and nutritional security of our growing population. I believe

that the situation is same in some other countries who have been facing similar challenges. In such a context, FAO's active interventions in building up a healthy agri-food system both at country and regional level in the Asia-Pacific Region is highly expected.

Excellencies,

7. In the 36th APRC, we have taken some agendas to pursue jointly and the progress is so far encouraging. The agendas of this 37th conference looks quite encouraging and carry the legacy of the 36th conference. This time, the agendas comprise need-based national and regional issues and priorities in agriculture, such as food security and nutrition, building resilience through agrifood systems transformation, investment and financing for poverty reduction and saving food and water and reducing losses and waste.

8. Now, this forum extends us the opportunity to discuss the challenges of food and nutrition security, prioritise the interventions both at national and regional level and guides the FAO to promote collaborative efforts. I expect the discussion here will see a positive attitude towards vulnerable countries like Bangladesh in the context of climate change and instabilities in fertilizer and fuel prices at global level and export restrictions. The exchange of technology and technical know-how now needs better modalities for transfer between developed and developing countries and modern tools in the era of 4th Industrial Revolution also need quick exchange to meet the technology gap among member countries.

9. Finally, I would recall our Honourable Prime Minister's observations that she made during the inauguration of the 36th APRC in Dhaka. Honourable Prime Minister encouraged greater regional collaboration amongst the countries in the field of agricultural research, sharing of cutting-edge technologies and creating a 'special fund' for increased investments for agricultural development. We hope that effective measures would be taken in this respect as desired by our Hon'ble Prime Minister.

10. Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu.

11. May the cooperation between Asia Pacific Region strengthens.