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Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

Chairperson,

Director-General, and

Distinguished Delegates,

1. I am deeply honored to address you at **the 33rd Session of FAO Regional Conference for Africa region.**

I extend my sincere appreciation to the government of **Morocco and the people** of Morocco for the excellent organization of this conference and warm welcome.

2. Before we delve into pressing matters of your region, I would like to offer condolences to families affected by wars and conflicts, also in your region amongst other in Yemen, South Sudan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and Somalia as well as from the **earthquake of 2023 in western Morocco.**

These crises not only cause immense human suffering but also contribute to heightened food insecurity, exacerbating the challenges faced by agrifood systems globally.

Let's face an uncomfortable truth. With the money the world is spending on wars and weapons this year, we could solve the food insecurity worldwide!

3. Of course, we have to work with the mandate of FAO. We have no option but to redouble our efforts to transform and where necessary rebuild agrifood systems especially in states confronted with wars or conflicts.

For now, we need to do everything to support the people who are suffering by giving them humanitarian support needed.

But we also have to look to the post-conflict phase.

We need to prepare to support them in rebuilding their agriculture, agri-logistics, agri-food systems, trade, and markets.

4. In the spirit of unity embodied by "**One FAO, one family,**" we must acknowledge the reality that the world is not on track to achieve global food security or meet **the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.**

We must face the uncomfortable truth.

We know our challenges, with Agenda 2030 and its SDG's, we have set our goals and targets, and we know the solutions, or at least we think we know.

But what about the 'how'? How are we going to do it?

There is often a deafening silence when it comes to implementation, including within FAO.

We must break this silence and translate our knowledge into action.

5. It is staggering to consider that, 27 years after the first **World Food Summit during which we discussed how to support 800 million people, we still have 800 million people suffering from hunger in 2023, with the number growing annually.**

The magnitude of these challenges calls for transformative actions at all levels.

We must focus on implementing solutions.

This requires a shift in mindset and a willingness to think outside the box.

6. **The Africa region is facing the biggest problems, but holds also immense potential for transformative change despite facing various challenges.**

The facts are striking: 146 million people across 36 countries have high levels of acute food insecurity in 2022, three fourths of the population of Africa may not have been able to afford a healthy diet in 2021 and undernourishment in Africa continued to rise in 2022, reaching about 20 percent, well above the global average.

By 2030, Africa's 1.67 billion inhabitants are expected to account for nearly 20 percent of the world's population.

Population growth will remain the major driver of rising food consumption in the continent.

7. I complement your region with the growth in your agriculture and fish production by 2.1 percent annually to 2030. Nevertheless, your significant economic growth, **your region remains home to most of the world's poor.**

Population growth, particularly among the youth, brings both opportunities and serious concerns regarding employment, geopolitical tensions, and interregional interdependencies.

8. Of course you are aware of the needed productivity challenges ranging from limited farm size to unproductive land tenure systems, lack of access to inputs, technologies and innovation, weak technological and institutional capacities, inadequate legal and regulatory frameworks and insufficient transport, storage and marketing infrastructure.

Nevertheless, agriculture (including crop production, animal husbandry, fisheries and forestry, and processing) will continue to be the most important sector for addressing food insecurity and poverty in Africa.

Also to stimulate economic growth and enhance economic transformation in Africa through raising rural incomes, creating jobs and increasing government revenue.

You deserve more global to face threats such as variations in water supply, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water governance and climate change impact agrifood systems in Africa as well to support **African Small Island Developing States (SIDS)**.

9. **To address these challenges, investments in science, innovation, and technology play a crucial role in increasing agricultural productivity** competitiveness and food security.

Globally we should support your call to increase funding for agricultural research and development, focusing on priority areas such as drought-resistant crops, climate-smart agriculture, precision agriculture, and improved storage and processing technologies.

10. But we all have to make sure that technologies and innovations are available, accessible, affordable, and ready to implement by small scale farmers.

Moreover, leveraging digital solutions and platforms can improve advisory services and market access for stakeholders in agrifood systems.

I compliment you with the progress of the initiatives **African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement**, which offer opportunities for investment and expanding trade.

Clearly there is the need for further strengthening it at a national level.

11. **Reducing Food Loss and Waste (FLW)** is another critical issue for transforming agrifood systems in your region, leading to increased efficiency, sustainability, resilience, and inclusiveness. This effort significantly contributes to food security and nutrition, economic development, and the mitigation of the climate footprint of food production and consumption.

The World Food Systems Summit has identified FLW reduction as one of its main priorities.

The Global Champions 12.3 coalition, in collaboration with the World Bank and FAO, has initiated actions at the country level. By conducting country diagnostics to determine the extent and causes of food loss and waste throughout the food supply chain, business cases will be developed for targeted investments to address these challenges.

The involvement of the private sector is crucial in this initiative, and I invite you to join these efforts.

12. Africa has been and will continue to be the region most adversely affected by climate change. It could lead to increased food insecurity high water stress, and up to 700 million people could be displaced due to climate change.

That why the Great Green Wall initiative, Africa's landmark initiative is so important to combat climate change and desertification and address food insecurity and poverty.

It is a good illustration of the importance of land restoration, together with water and trees

management at a large.

It is a major intervention of nature-based solutions.

13. The momentum for high-level political commitment for the promotion of native crops and non-wood forest products is growing.

Native crops and NWFPs have an important role to play in transforming agrifood systems to better withstand the impact of climate change and protect biodiversity, while promoting smallholders' livelihoods, delivering nutrition and healthy diets for all.

Native crops and NWFPs have been shown to be sustainable in that they have nutritional, environmental, sociocultural, and economic benefits.

14. **Partnerships and collaboration with essential stakeholders, including the private sector and youth, are paramount to driving change in your region.**

Public expenditure on agriculture in Africa remains low compared to other regions. It is hindering technological and innovative advancements in agrifood systems.

15. **The funding gap is estimated at 21 billion USD in public spending per year.**

To address the financial gap and enhancing investments of International Financial Institutions, private sector and blended financing partnership present an important strategic to scale up funding.

We have to be more creative in getting more investments from the private sector, de-risk investments, facilitate impact investment and promote blended finance.

16. May I make a special appeal to you to **support youth** through programs and **financial support**, for example for start-ups.

17. Given the need for a tailored-country approach, adjustments to the FAO Country Offices network are crucial.

We need a modern and efficient network with clearly defined responsibilities for both regional and national offices.

It's imperative that FAO's country network has to be fit for purpose and capable of meeting the expectations of its members.

Therefore, I strongly endorse your suggestion that this process should involve transparent consultations with members.

18. May I ask you for a special acknowledgment for the dedicated FAO staff in your region, particularly at national level, working under challenging circumstances of the direct contact with the suffering of many people. Their efforts are commendable.

*Chairperson,
Director-General, and
Distinguished Delegates,*

To conclude, the Regional Conference for Africa plays a pivotal role in global change-making. The dedication and commitment of your governments will shape FAO's trajectory in serving humanity. Together, we can effectively combat hunger and malnutrition worldwide. As Nelson Mandela wisely said, "It always seems impossible until it is done."

Let us embrace his spirit, courage, and passion as we strive towards achieving the seemingly impossible.