

## Statement of the Chair of the 36<sup>th</sup> Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East

In the name of Allah Most Gracious Most Merciful  
Your Excellency Mr Independent Chairperson of the Council,  
Your Excellency Mr Director-General of FAO,  
Your Excellencies Ministers,  
Your Excellencies Ambassadors,  
Honourable Delegates,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is an honour for me to welcome you to the 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East and, for those who were able to join in person, welcome you to Baghdad. I thank you for your participation and commitment to this important Conference.
2. After two years, our region continues to face the far reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including on the working modalities of our Regional Conference which this year is held in hybrid modality with precautionary health measures in place.
3. As we have all seen, the impacts of the pandemic on food production and food security has compounded the multiple intersecting risks our countries face as a result of conflict, climate change, resource degradation, transboundary plant and animal pests and disease to name a few.
4. As a result, our region is the only region in the world where extreme poverty is still on the rise. Levels of undernourishment and food insecurity have deteriorated in the majority of NENA countries and the triple burden of malnutrition continues to endure along with a clear and persistent gender gap.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. I would like to thank His Excellency Saud bin Hamoud bin Ahmed Al-Habsi, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources of the Sultanate of Oman for his excellent Chairmanship of the previous, thirty fifth, session of the Regional Conference Regional Conference
6. In its thirty fifth session, the Region Conference endorsed four regional priorities which form the backbone of FAO's programme of work in the region as well as the COVID-19 response and recovery programme.
7. As was presented in the Senior Officers Meeting and is captured in the conference documents, FAO has since delivered substantial results under each of the priorities and

responded with agility to provide a range of support to Country Offices, mobilizing both internal and external resources for monitoring and assessment activities.

8. This regional programme of work fits within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 adopted last year and its aim of ensuring more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems through better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life. The Framework responds directly to the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.
9. I also take this opportunity to highlight the important initiatives launched by FAO Director General Dr. Dongyu including the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, Digital Village Initiative and the One Country One Product initiative which have already started implementation in several countries across the region. I would like to commend the efforts of Dr. Dongyu in transforming FAO to be more agile, fit-for-purpose and innovative.
10. I am pleased to see that the recommendations emerging from the Senior Officers Meeting addressed the range of critical challenges faced by the region. Key among the recommendations are the:
  - a. Adoption of a Regional Agrifood Systems Transformative Agenda with a focus on sustainable, resilient and nutrition-sensitive agrifood systems to reduce hunger, poverty and eliminate all forms of malnutrition;
  - b. Adoption of policy frameworks that promote trade, governance of multiple risks, extension and advisory services, shock-responsive social protection, agriculture insurance, gender equality and equal access to resources, services and income;
  - c. Strengthen regional collaboration including through the establishment of a regional mechanism to monitor the impacts of climate change on agriculture and food security in the region, and the establishment of a regional trust fund to control transboundary pests and diseases;
  - d. Mobilization of public and private investments in infrastructure, including digital infrastructure, and adoption of territorial approaches as well as sustainable agriculture to promote more inclusive and sustainable agrifood value chains;
  - e. Strengthen coordination between water, food security, climate and environmental policies;
  - f. Adoption of holistic and multi-hazard approach for agrifood systems' risk management as well as a One Health approach to combat biological hazards
  - g. Investment in science and research targeting the development, dissemination and adoption of innovations (technological, institutional, social, financial and policy) to strengthen resilience and promote rural transformation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. An important outcome of this meeting is to elicit the views of Honorable Ministers and Conference Members on the role and efficacy of FAO - guided by the Strategic

Framework 2022-2031 and the regional priorities - in supporting countries to overcome the complex challenges faced and achieving food security and nutrition through sustainable, inclusive and resilient agrifood systems.

12. The Regional Conference brings together major stakeholders and actors to strengthen joint action and its outcomes must be fully owned by Your Excellencies and Members.
13. I look forward in this Ministerial Session to identify concrete recommendations and guidance on issues of great regional importance including water scarcity, resilience building and disaster risk reduction, decent employment for youth and women, gender equality, sustainable agriculture for small scale producers, transboundary plant and animal pests and disease, agribusiness and value chain development, nutrition and food trade as well as food loss and waste.
14. On all of these critical issues there is a need and an opportunity to work together to accelerate efforts to overcome challenges and leverage the opportunities of agrifood system transformation.
15. Once I again I thank you all for your participation in this important forum and hope for fruitful and productive deliberations as well as continued and strengthened regional cooperation to achieve our common vision embodied by the SDGs for a peaceful, prosperous and food secure region.