

February 2014

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منظمة الأغذية
والزراعة للأمم
المتحدة

联合国
粮食及
农业组织

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

FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

Thirty-second Session

Rome, Italy, 24-28 February 2014

STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF FAO

Your Excellency Izzeddin Abdullah Aldola, Minister for Agriculture of Iraq, Chairperson of the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East

Honorable Ministers,

Your Excellency Wilfred Ngirwa, Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council,

Your Excellency Gerda Verburg, Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security,

Mr Yousef Jhail, Permanent Representative of Kuwait, Chairperson of the Near East Group,

Distinguished Ambassadors, Delegates,

Your Excellencies,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is a pleasure to welcome you to Rome for the Thirty-Second FAO Regional Conference for the Near East and North Africa.
2. Today, we are reporting back to you on the work that has been done over the past 24 months and will present to you what is next in our horizon.
3. I would like to start by framing what we have done and what still lies ahead against the backdrop of 2013.
4. The First Millennium Development Goal hunger target of reducing by half the proportion of undernourishment in the population is still within reach. But progress between regions and within regions have been different.

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5. In North Africa, undernourishment remains below 5 percent. However, the proportion of hungry people has gone up in Western Asia, from over 6 percent in 1990-1992 to almost 10 percent in 2011-2013.
6. The worsening of the food security situation in the Near East Region is not just the reflection of the structural constraints it faces in producing enough food and its increasing dependence on food imports.
7. It is largely driven by factors such as conflicts, the flow of refugees and migration, especially of young people looking for opportunities in other countries.
8. All of these are issues that are not withheld by national borders. They affect the region as a whole and have repercussions far beyond it as well.
9. We know that there is an intrinsic link between peace and food security; hunger and conflict.
10. Peace is fundamental for food security and food security is fundamental for peace. We have seen how dispute for food and natural resources such as land and water have triggered conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. Over the past two years, FAO underwent a significant transformational change to better assist our Members in responding to them. I would now like to give you a few examples of what we have accomplished so far.
12. First, we brought the FAO reform to a successful close. This put an end to an important and necessary process, but that was also time consuming and very expensive. It took 10 years and cost over 90 million dollars.
13. Second, we mapped a new route. We revisited FAO's strategic framework and strategic objectives. Through a consultative and bottom-up process, the Regional Conferences helped define and sharpen the focus of our work.
14. As a result we now have five strategic objectives, down from over 10 in 2012-2013. And our results-based Program of Work transforms our strategic objectives into tangible, measurable results.
15. Third, we are integrating our Regular Program and voluntary contributions, and aligning the Country Program Frameworks and Technical Cooperation Program with the regional priorities and our corporate strategic framework. We have put in place the first truly results-oriented PWB in FAO history.
16. Fourth, we have strengthened decentralization and improved our presence in the field by creating over 50 new positions at regional and sub-regional offices, responding to needs identified at the Regional Conferences.
17. And we have been able to decentralize without increasing our overall budget and without weakening our technical capacity at Headquarters. This is the way to build a renewed knowledge organization with its feet on the ground.
18. And, fifth, we have renewed our team of FAO Representatives and have included a rigorous selection process and performance appraisal.
19. I could name more accomplishments, but I will stop here.

20. I do want to point out that all the changes being made have only one goal: improve the assistance we provide to you, our Members, in meeting your food security and agricultural development goals.
21. I also want to point out that everything we are doing is made possible by the rebuilt trust among Members and Management. This is not something that we take for granted, and we work hard every day for you to keep on trusting us.
22. I would also like to note that we have made important advances despite an increasingly restrictive budget, which continues in the current biennium. We are taking the necessary measures to deliver the agreed on program of work with a lower budget level.
23. At the same time, I am happy to inform that voluntary contributions to FAO in 2012-2013 were above the established target and at a similar level to the previous biennium.

Ladies and gentlemen,

24. I would now like to show how the changes that FAO is going through at the corporate and global level benefit the Near East and North Africa region.
25. We are aligning national, regional and global priorities for FAO's work, in line with the revised strategic framework. In this regard, I am pleased to inform that 10 Country Program Frameworks have been finalized. Work is ongoing in 7 others.
26. We have reviewed the skills mix in the Regional Office to better deliver the identified regional priorities. Positions in the areas of Natural Resource Management, Trade and Investment, Gender, Partnership, Strategic Planning and Communication have been established and are being filled.
27. We are also progressively strengthening the capacity of the country offices. Deputy FAO Representative positions have been established in countries where the size and complexity of the program justify it. This is already the case in Yemen and Sudan and may soon be implemented in Syria.
28. We are rebuilding the team at our subregional Gulf Office.
29. During 2012-2013, 100 million dollars were mobilized to support the work at the national level, in particular in countries affected by conflict and emergencies. However, funding still remains a major constraint to scaling up FAO's work at country-level in the region.
30. I would like to call on the generosity of the higher-income countries in the region to expand their South-South support through FAO to national and regional programs.
31. And let me thank the Government of Iraq for its generous contribution that will help kick-start the activities of the Regional Solidarity Trust Fund requested by the last Regional Conference. I hope that others may soon follow this good example of regional cooperation.
32. I also would like to highlight the importance for a region-wide strategy and funding to support food security in Yemen. This issue will be further discussed at a side event this afternoon that I hope you can attend.

My friends,

33. We have done a lot. But nothing that we have done so far will really matter unless we transform our vision into reality.
34. It is time to implement our Program of Work, and for the renewed FAO to swing from planning into action.

35. The main instrument we have to deliver results at the regional level are the regional initiatives. Three regional initiatives for the Near East and North Africa are in different stages of implementation.
36. They are aligned to the reviewed strategic framework and respond to priorities you identified at the last Regional Conference.
37. The first regional initiative relates to water scarcity. Its focus is to improve the agricultural use of water through a comprehensive set of interventions from the policy to the local level.
38. The second regional initiative looks to build resilience in the Near East and North Africa.
39. And the third one is the Regional Initiative on Small-scale Agriculture and Inclusive Rural Development.
40. These regional initiatives have been presented at the senior officers meeting. I hope to have your support in their implementation, and look forward to receive your suggestions on how we can make them even more useful to you.
41. Let me add that at your request, we have increased dialogue with governments, regional organizations, private sector and civil society over the past two years. There have been discussions on food security, gender, land and water and family farming.
42. And, as you are aware, 2014 was declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Family Farming.
43. In this framework, regional dialogues to better understand how we can support this sector took place around the world. The Near East and North Africa dialogue was held last October, in Tunis, with the participation of 15 countries.
44. In these regional dialogues, common areas of support to family farming have emerged.
45. In particular, there is the recognition that we need to increase access by family farmers to adequate technologies, financial services, markets and to natural resources, such as land and water.
46. Regarding this last point, as you know, the Committee on World Food Security approved the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure in 2012.
47. FAO is now supporting some 50 countries in implementing them. Given the importance of governance of tenure for the countries in the region, I hope that this will soon become a bigger part of our portfolio in the region.
48. I would also like to remind you that the CFS is now conducting consultations on Principles of Responsible Agricultural Investments. I urge you to participate in this discussion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

49. I want to end by saying that since 2011 I have had the honor of visiting at least 13 countries that are part of this regional group. I have been in the Gulf, in the Maghreb, and in the Sahel.
50. In all countries I have been struck by the challenges that the region faces, but also by its potential and its willingness to work together to overcome them.
51. I was received with open arms in every city I visited. And every one I spoke to welcomed FAO's cooperation and partnership.
52. I would like to thank you for that, and reaffirm that we are here to work for you.

53. FAO looks forward to receiving your guidance and views at this Regional Conference. And I hope that in the years to come we will be able to count with the same support you have given us until now.

54. I wish you all fruitful deliberations and a pleasant stay in Rome.

Thank you for your attention.