

# CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



World Health  
Organization

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**CX/NE 19/10/CRD1**  
Original Language Only

**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME**  
**FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR THE NEAR EAST**  
**Tenth Session**  
**FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy, 11-15 November 2019**  
**OPENING REMARKS**

*CONFIRM AGAINST DELIVERED*

**MR MARKUS LIPP, HEAD OF THE FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY UNIT, FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO)**

It is my privilege to welcome you on behalf of Dr Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agricultural Organization of United Nations to the Near East Coordinating Committee for Codex Alimentarius.

Codex Coordinating Committees serve a critical purpose; amongst others, they provide a regional platform to discuss in depth issues of regional importance, they provide countries the opportunity to express their needs to FAO and WHO, and they provide the opportunity to plan and coordinate on representing regional priorities to other Codex Committees.

But let us back out a little and start from the beginning. Allow me to recall why we are gathering here today and to remind us all what the ultimate drivers and motivators of Codex are.

After air and water, safe and nutritious food is the third most immediate need of all humans. Reliable and sustained access to and the availability of safe and nutritious food is a critical enabler and indispensable for all human development, public health and economic prosperity.

That food needs to be safe is essential and cast into the very definition of food:

If it is not safe, it is not food

Being able to enjoy food that is safe, nutritious and in sufficient amounts is at the core of all human development and one of the leading indicators to achieve food security and nutritional equivalence. It is essential for trade and critical for the reduction of poverty.

For the Food and Agriculture Organization, food safety is critically linked to several sustainable development goals (SDGs), including poverty eradication (SDG1), achieving zero hunger (SDG2) and ensuring good health and well-being for all (SDG 3), among others.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission has of course two goals: to promote food safety and to ensure fair trading practices. Both of these goals are critically linked to a series of SDG goals, and are prerequisites to achieve zero hunger as well as to eradicate poverty.

This is the 10th meeting of the Near East Coordinating Committee for Codex Alimentarius, a proud history and quite an accomplishment. Thank you for your dedication to help make this Coordinating Committee a success.

We certainly hope you will engage in the topics on agenda of this coordinating committee and contribute to an engaging and informative meeting. This year's keynote address will focus on contaminants in foods. A topic of high relevance to food safety and of long-standing interest to Codex and all its member states. Contaminants are also a topic that is simultaneously shaped by extremes, on the one hand fear, mainly triggered by uncareful reporting and on the other hand veritable success stories of how food can be safely manufactured despite the many challenges that contaminants in the environment can pose. The potential presence of contaminants in foods is always unintentional, nobody "owns" - so to speak - contaminants, no one even wants them there. But they are just there - present in the soil, in the water, in the air; contaminants are a topic where the wisdom of the first toxicologist ever, Paracelsus, is more true than ever: the dose makes the poison. A seemingly simple message and one of fundamental truth. But also a message that is challenging to communicate.

This is where uncareful reporting comes into play. The communication of food safety risk is very challenging

as very small amount of a substance or contaminants in most cases is innocuous, or in other words of no health concern, while the same substance when ingested at a higher level can cause serious health risks. This is a not an easy thing to communicate to citizens. We truly hope that you will find the keynote lecture enlightening. Dr Mark Feeley, the presenter of the key note, is a renowned world expert in this field and I have had already personally the privilege to have learned much from him in the past.

We have also prepared two side events for you. On Thursday morning we have prepared an exciting side event on “Multi-disciplinary insights on addressing food fraud” for which we have a speaker selected that hopefully will provide you with new insights on this topic. A speaker from Interpol will provide interesting insights into the world of enforcement activities against food fraud, and another presentation will center around new food systems & digitization to mitigate food fraud. Last but not least, we will hear about suitable analytical approaches.

Our second side event on Thursday afternoon will provide you with deeper insights into the application of the FAO/WHO Diagnostic Tool for National Codex Programmes especially with a focus on its utility for Codex Trust Fund projects.

There are many important topics on your agenda that will undoubtedly require quite some energy and time from you to make progress on all these important issues. And I certainly do not want to take away more of your precious time.

Please allow me therefore to thank you again on behalf of FAO for joining us here and this week for the 10th meeting of the Near East Coordinating Committee for Codex Alimentarius. We are looking forward to your deliberation and I remain with wishing you a successful meeting.

#### **MR PHILIPPE VERGER, ADVISOR FOOD SAFETY, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)**

It's a pleasure welcoming you, on behalf of WHO, to this FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near-East.

As you certainly know, the impact of food safety, with or without spectacular media coverage, remains very significant both in terms of human health and economic lost: WHO estimated in 2015 the burden of diseases for 31 foodborne hazards and concluded that unsafe foods are killing 420,000 people every year. The Middle East together with Africa, is one of the Regions carrying the highest burden. Moreover, the World Bank estimated the productivity loss of unsafe food to be some US\$95 billion per year worldwide for low- and middle-income countries.

Within the Eastern Mediterranean Region, WHO developed a Regional Plan of Action for Food Safety and is providing concrete support to increase capacity of countries to conduct well defined actions:

- Inter-sectoral collaboration: the various Ministries should interact, elaborate a common strategy and share data and information. WHO together with FAO and OIE can help countries achieve this objective by promoting a one-health approach.
- Risk-based laws and regulations: Countries should develop, implement and enforce food safety legislation inspired by the Codex standards, guidelines and recommendations. FAO and WHO are supporting countries to contribute to the development of Codex standards through the Codex Trust Fund.
- Emergency preparedness and response: In addition to a robust regulation, countries should be ready to respond to and manage unexpected events for which a rapid response may save lives. INFOSAN is a global network managed by FAO and WHO, providing training, allowing exchange of information and supporting crisis management.
- Disease surveillance and exposure: The monitoring of (foodborne) diseases is a corner stone for a food safety system which allows to estimate the burden of disease from foodborne sources as well as the impact of mitigation measures. WHO has developed comprehensive guidance for Strengthening the surveillance and assessing the national burden of foodborne diseases.
- Product monitoring: monitoring hazards in food is important to assess risks, attribute the burden of foodborne disease to specific foods. It also facilitates market access for national food products to be traded regionally and globally. FAO and WHO have developed the GEMS/Food platform which is used to share data on hazards in food and feed between countries and with the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

To effectively drive the global health agenda and to fulfil its mission, WHO must change: Country needs must be at the centre of WHO's work and the organization, across all three levels (national, regional and global), is committed to optimize the technical support to country. In this effort, WHO will focus on change that drives improved country level delivery and impact.

One consequence of the transformation agenda and the new ways of working in WHO is that countries, through

their Ministries of Health in consultation with other ministries, should prepare an annual Country Support Plan. This has been completed for the new biennium that starts in January 2020 but it should be noted that only 4 countries in the Codex Near East region requested support in the field of food safety... If countries are not planning food safety activities in their Country Support Plan, support cannot be provided.

The second consequence of this transformation is that, when a support is requested from WHO, it is critical to highlight the impact that this support will have on public health and how this impact can be measured. So concrete measurements of our actions in terms of country impact become essential. This must be at the base of all our cooperation with countries from now on.

To conclude I would say that in the future, Member States can be more demanding of WHO as we developed tools and methods which can make a difference in the design and implementation of a risk-based food safety policy. At the same time, WHO will be more demanding of countries; requesting planned and structured interventions and a better coordination between food safety authorities, ministries of health and other sectors that are key in ensuring safe food from farm to fork. Furthermore, the establishment of indicators to measure the impact of WHO support in the area of food safety should create some pressure for timely implementation of WHO recommendations.

We strongly believe that this transformation should lead to a more effective role of international organizations. Ultimately, a technical support better targeted to the country needs should result in safer food for consumers in the region and all around the world.

#### **MR GUILHERME ANTONIO DA COSTA JR, CHAIRPERSON OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION**

It is with great honour and pleasure that I am here to participate in this 10th Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East, a Committee of particular importance in the structure and work of Codex Alimentarius and for this Region.

This Committee, like the other Regional Coordinating Committees, has been developing coordination work of paramount importance in the area of food safety and fair practices in food trade for Codex as a whole and especially for the Regional needs. The definition of the problems and needs of the region concerning food standards and food control and working collectively at the regional level give the countries the condition to highlight regulatory issues arising from food control in order to strengthen their food control infrastructures.

This work and the benefits generated by the CCNE are fully in line with the working platform of the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Codex Alimentarius.

We are all aware of the practical importance of the work developed by the region on food safety. The countries of the region recognize, for instance, the importance of developing practical actions and recommendations for capacity building to promote food safety in the region. In this context, I would like to highlight and congratulate the Codex Secretariat and the Regional Member Countries for the 2-day workshop on Codex webtools.

One of the big challenges we all face is the need to feed more than 9 billion people in 2050. That said, the element of food security immediately comes to our minds, and consequently the element "amount of food". However, the food security issue is much broader than food quantity. To guarantee food security it is essential that we combine food quantity with at least two other elements: food safety and trade. We cannot have food security if the sufficient amount of food is not safe. Equally, we cannot have food security if we cannot trade sufficient safe food from production to consumption areas. This work developed by the regions is therefore absolutely paramount to guide and achieve this combination between these three elements. It is not possible to think in food security without food safety and trade. In this context, it is absolutely critical to keep in mind the harmonisation process using the work developed by the Member Countries for Codex, and the result of this work along with their own legislation.

We have a very important and robust agenda during these next days. Among the many relevant topics, I would like to exemplify the:

- Food safety and quality situation in the countries of the region: current and emerging issues in the region;
- Use of Codex standards in the region;
- Draft regional standard for mixed zaatar;
- Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025 - Roadmap to implementation, etc.

As usual, we will surely have an extremely productive Session, as we seek consensus. And to build consensus, it is necessary to keep in mind, among other aspects, the following question:

"How can I cooperate so that the other Member State, my commercial partner, can also guarantee protection for the health of its consumers and have room in the trade that can generate foreign exchange and jobs for its population?"

This is a question I suggest we keep really alive in our working process. I believe this is an important way in which we have to continue working in this Committee, as well as in the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025, with the real and practical willingness to build a better Codex for the world.

Having said that and with the pleasure of having my dear friends Vice-Chairpersons of the Codex Alimentarius, Mariam Eid, Purwiyatno Hariyadi and Steve Wearne – Pur and Steve will join us later - I would like to reiterate the honour of being here with you all and wish everyone successful work during this week.

Thank you very much for your attention

#### **MR. TOM HEILANDT, SECRETARY, CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION**

Today is 11.11. Which means different things in different countries. In China it is singles day usually leading to billions being spent in online shopping. In Germany it is the start of the 5th Season of the year – the Carnival. Here in Rome we start the 10th CCNEA meaning your committee is about 20 years old, our youngest FAO/WHO Coordinating committee.

The good thing to be speaking after Codex' two parents and the Codex chair is that most things have been said.

FAO spoke about the need for safe good food for everyone. WHO spoke about the continuing issue of the burden of food borne diseases. Our Chairperson, Guilherme da Costa spoke about the need for countries to cooperate in everybody's interest for safe and fair trade in food.

We all want that food is:

- Available, safe and nutritious
- Affordable, tasty and sustainably produced; and
- Assuring the livelihoods of the people who work hard to produce it especially in rural areas

Hunger is a useful feeling that we all need to know: It tells us when to eat - and when to stop. Being hungry and not having safe and nutritious food available is a tragedy that has existed all through humanities' history but there is no excuse for it to persist today – it is our moral duty to eradicate it. Through codex you all are contributing to it.

The self-created pandemic of obesity and rise of non-communicable diseases through unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles is a rising tragedy that should not happen and each of us can contribute to stop it. Codex is involved in these discussions as well.

Everyone should have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food and to all the information and education they need to lead a good life.

Last year I met Ban Ki Moon. He told me that one of the strongest memories of his time as United Nations Secretary General was the adoption of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development when all leaders of the world were united. He also told me that he was worried now because he could see much more division among nations.

The United Nations General Assembly last year followed our initiative to declare 7 June of every year WORLD FOOD SAFETY DAY as an opportunity to inspire action to help prevent, detect and manage foodborne risks, contributing to food security, human health, economic prosperity and sustainable development. It is a day to show our unity in face of the continuing challenges and I invite all of you to participate in the successful participation in celebrating the second World Food Safety Day on 7/6/2020.

This will be another opportunity for us to demonstrate unity and the important of keeping food safe in every home.

The Codex Secretariat – though having two parents, is located here in FAO.

Dr Qu Dongyu, the new Director-General of FAO has presented his vision for FAO which is relevant for Codex:

- Uniting forces of Members through a hand-in-hand initiative
- Better understand sustainability and promote sustainable agriculture
- Innovation of mindset, approaches, cooperation models, application by digitalization.
- Strengthen coordination with private sector and civil society to leverage their unique roles and expertise.

- Consult with Chief scientists to cover development strategy and policy, digital farming and digital rural development, food security and nutrition, trans-boundary diseases control and environment, climate change and biodiversity conservation, small island development and fisheries, and market information and trade.
- Strengthen technical cooperation, capacity building and joint training, and transform policies, norm setting and technologies into practical outputs driving the development.
- Mission focus on attaining “Zero Hunger” and improving malnutrition and livelihoods of people by “four betters”: better production, better nutrition, better environment and better life.

There is a particular focus on science which is good for Codex as Codex has to base itself on the best available science. There is another focus on impact and implementation which is very much in line with the new Codex strategic plan.

There is a lot to do but we can achieve it if we mutually support each other based on joint principles and vision.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**MR. MOHAMMAD HOSSEIN EMADI, AMBASSADOR, PERMANENT MISSION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN TO FAO AND UN ORGANIZATIONS IN ROME**

It is my pleasure to welcome the participants of the 10th session of the of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East on behalf of Institute of Standard and Industrial Research of Iran (ISIRI ).

The issue of revitalization and strengthening of the region has been under discussion in recent years. Given renewed volatility in the world markets, efforts of all countries to monitor food safety and develop international food standards have become more important than ever. Similarly, the role of effective cooperation and constructive dialogue between the Members of the region has become clear in this context.

I would like to emphasize on the importance of this meeting with its rich Agenda, and the decisions that you will be making. Ensuring food safety is a sophisticated task considering the challenges brought by globalization and international food trade, increased demand for safer and better quality of food, threats that arise from new and intensification technologies of food production.

Due to the dynamics of international trade and the emergence of new cross-border challenges and threats, the degree of interdependence between States has increased and urges us to work together closely. Ensuring food safety can be achieved only by coordinated actions across sectors endeavors, mutually shared information and collaboration.

Iran as one the active Members of Codex commission which has appointed for CCNE since 2015 has conducted national measures such as determination of critical and necessary issues, reviewing national standards based on food safety in addition to promote collaboration in regional level. More over at the occasion of the World Food Safety Day, we have celebrated the same event in our country, hosting of all associated officials and stakeholders which led to establishment of "Steering Committee" and every one of the officials has committed for controlling the food systems and ensuring food safety in the country.

Thus, we do believe in the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, we see a great opportunity for cooperation between governments and consumers. Understanding the importance of this direction, I am sure that activities in this regard will be significant.

I sincerely wish much success and fruitful work to this session's participants. Thank you.