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Excellencies,

As the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection has spread to pandemic proportions over the last few weeks, I feel – in my role as Chair of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) – that we have both a moral and political obligation to initiate a proactive dialogue among our stakeholders on the implications and potential impacts of this pandemic on global food security and nutrition. As a Committee, our prompt and resolute action and messages must have one goal in mind: to urge as strongly as possible that all responsible leaders – in governments, business, academia, civil society, and elsewhere – do everything in their power to prevent this health crisis from becoming a food crisis. We saw such a scenario occur only a decade earlier when a financial crisis morphed into such a food crisis. We must avoid this from happening again, for the sake of our peoples and our planet. Sitting idly by is not an option.

As a first step, within my authorities as Chairperson, I requested the CFS High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) to prepare an *Issue Paper* on COVID-19 and its impacts on food security, to provide a brief, preliminary analysis of the likely short, medium, and long-term impacts on our global food system and on food security and nutrition, broadly. Furthermore, at my request, the CFS Bureau along with members of its (ad hoc) Advisory Group convened a virtual video conference on Thursday, March 19 to discuss this topic, utilizing the HLPE paper along with expert briefings from the three UN Rome-based Agencies, the World Health Organization, and the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the 2021 Food Systems Summit.

I encourage all CFS stakeholders to carefully study the attached HLPE Issue Paper and share it among your constituencies. It is only by ensuring that food security and nutrition concerns are a major part of the international response to this pandemic that we will be able to limit any increase to the (already unacceptably high) numbers of hungry and malnourished around the world. This effort will continue to be a collaborative effort, particularly to support the Rome-based Agencies in their efforts to respond to this crisis within their mandates and with all the expertise and experience they bring to the table.

I am aware that this crisis is still evolving, and that it is already unprecedented in scale, and changing rapidly and with many unknowns. The HLPE will continue taking stock of the evolving situation and update their Issue Paper accordingly, retaining its focus on the potential impacts of the pandemic on the four central pillars of food security – availability, access, stability, and utilization. One key message clearly emerges from their analysis: we must act promptly, and together! During such emergency situations, collaboration and cooperation between and among countries is of the utmost importance to achieve our shared goals. As countries across the world are asked to unite - in a spirit of solidarity - coordinated and targeted actions will need to be taken to ensure global food security and nutrition for all.

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In this context, food security and agricultural policies are key to enabling countries to fight viral epidemics and the shocks they cause in food supply chains, by ensuring the normal functioning of the international and national agricultural and food supply chains. Now is not the time to panic. Now is the time for careful, measured steps to ensure nutritious food continues to arrive at markets in a timely and organized manner, that food workers are permitted to continue planting, harvesting, transporting, and selling food under careful procedures to ensure their safety and ours. Governments must ensure social protections are either strengthened, retained, or put into place to protect the most vulnerable – elderly, handicapped, pregnant women and infants, school children who depend upon school feeding programs, prisoners, and other groups that are dependent on feeding programmes.

The current situation could represent an opportunity to highlight the importance of strengthening government management of food markets, protecting marginalized populations who have less power and resources to adapt to such an unpredictable crisis, and difficulty accessing nutritious foods already. Never before has it been so important for all of us to focus our collective energy and efforts on promoting resilient, sustainable food systems. The work of the CFS precisely on these topics will continue, with anticipated adoption of Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems for Nutrition and Policy Recommendations at CFS 47 this October. We will also contribute our policy guidance to the successful preparation for, and implementation of, the United Nations' Secretary General's Food Systems Summit in 2021.

In addition to saving lives and meeting immediate needs through emergency responses, we need to start planning for longer-term solutions to support recovery, strengthen preparedness, build resilience, and promote sustainable socio-economic development. To this end, CFS has created policy recommendations that can be put to use in this juncture, especially the Principles on Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems, and various CFS policy recommendations such as on social protection, food loss and waste, sustainable agriculture, and smallholders and markets.

In line with its vision to be *“the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for a broad range of committed stakeholders to work together in a coordinated manner and in support of country-led processes towards the elimination of hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all human beings,”* CFS stands ready to continue to play its role by providing a space to exchange experiences and lessons-learned, as well as evidence-based policy guidance to overcome the challenges and uncertainties of this difficult time. We still have time to prevent a major food crisis resulting from this pandemic, but only if we act together and now.

Yours Sincerely,



Thanawat Tiensin  
Chairperson  
Committee on World Food Security