

**Statement delivered by  
Her Excellency Mariam Al Meheiri  
Minister of State for Food Security of the United Arab Emirates  
on the occasion of the  
41st Session of the FAO Conference, Rome, Italy (22-29 June 2019)  
24 June 2019**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you here at the 41st FAO Conference. I want to thank the organizers and also thank you all for being here and for your patience and for taking the time to listen to what the United Arab Emirates is doing to promote national and global food security.

If I may, I would like to start by making an observation. The first ever FAO Conference was held in Quebec in 16<sup>th</sup> October 1945, just two months after the end of the Second World War. A global conflict that brought so much devastation. However, 75 years after this inaugural FAO event, we find ourselves standing at a critical tipping point that threatens to engulf the world in a new crisis. One of runaway climate change, the repercussions of which will likely eclipse the impact, not only of the Second World War but of all wars ever.

I recently returned from the EAT Stockholm Food Forum, which focused on the findings of the EAT Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health. The Commission found that universal adoption of a planetary health diet was essential if we are to avoid severe environmental degradation and the deaths of approximately 11 million people annually. It called for nothing less than a great food transformation.

Fortunately, we have the capacity to effect this change if we act now. The food production models that have nurtured humanity to this point have enabled us to develop technologically advanced societies that can find sustainable ways of producing food. Innovation is the core of the United Arab Emirates National Food Security of which I am proud to lead as the First Minister of Food Security. The strategy which has three years of a detailed plan aiming to make sure that the UAE is not only food secure today, but also in future.

We aim for becoming amongst the top 10 most food secure countries in the world by 2021. We are a water scarce country, we have very little arable land, so technology has been identified as the key to improving the UAE's food security status. At present we are ranked 31<sup>st</sup> in the Global Food Security Strategy, so although considered food secure, this position has been achieved while we import 90 percent of our food. Naturally, this makes us liable to disruptions in food supply chains, particularly in view of the volatilities in the region.

In meeting my country's burgeoning demand of food, we have been working to facilitate the role of technology in agriculture. I would like to give you some examples. We have used a government accelerator platform to successfully remove barriers in the current local food production sector in order to ramp up the adoption of technology. We attracted over 50 stakeholders from the private sector, academia, the youth, we brought everyone together and said, 'lets remove the barriers that exist now', and thankfully we came up with ten new initiatives in less than 100 days, and basically the process opened up a new economic sector that we call Agtech.

So among these initiatives that were announced, we now have a unified Agtech license across the nation. We have established building codes for closed system farming. We have established also, a National Sustainable Agriculture label. We also have now set up the platform for a database for potential Agtech investors. So these, along with other important initiatives, are all aimed at creating a cultural movement that values food, strengthens our relationship with it and creates a better understanding of our food needs as a society.

In other words, I am sure you have heard of disrupting the food systems, So we are not only disrupting the production food systems but also the way we behave towards food. So we are already seeing very positive results from creating an Agtech environment in the UAE. So, one of our examples, we have a commercial application of tomato farming, where we now see that we only need four litres of water to grow 1kg of tomato instead of over 200 liters. Also, I'm sure that you have heard of the announcements of one of the biggest vertical farms that is going to built. It will be harvesting 6,000lbs of leafy greens on a daily basis to cater for the needs of one of our most famous national airlines.

Another important area we are involved in, is in the research and development areas. We are really trying to push the boundaries of biotechnology, which we are developing with the academic sector and experts form the public and private sectors. So, this aims to increase food yield through techniques that include seed enhancement, smart water harvesting, closed system agriculture, with the goal of improving production by 30 percent.

Aquaculture is also a significant area which we are working on and the Government has also invested so far, more than USD 100 million in this sector. So the mission of the National Food Security Strategy is to enable the UAE to become a world leader in innovation driven food security.

We are not just looking at food security on a national level, but are also committed to our role as a global food security on all levels. So with this in mind, the UN SDGs are embedded in all UAE National Strategies with targets such as reduction of food loss and food waste aligned with the SDG targets.

Global food security challenges cannot be overcome by a single state such as ours, it is the creation of stable international partnership that is fundamental to meeting global food production targets sustainably that can provide adequate nutrition for all.

And as I see the time is up, I will stop here.

Thank you very much. Thank you.