

Statement of Lebanon
42nd Session
FAO Conference
by Lebanese Minister of Agriculture H. E. Dr Abbas Mortada
14–18 June 2021

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Excellencies and Honourable and Distinguished attendees,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to address you on the occasion of the 42nd session of FAO Conference, which is being held virtually this year given the severe impact that current crises are having on the world's peoples and economies. The global food situation and food supply chains have been adversely affected throughout the previous period, with consequent impact on efforts to combat hunger and malnutrition and strengthen food security. There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic, on top of economic crises and the effects of climate change, has made food and nutritional security a fundamental issue and put the agriculture and food sectors high on the list of global and country priorities.

FAO's new vision on Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: from Strategy to Action for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life is of the utmost importance at this stage, especially when it comes to confronting the challenges arising from the sustainable development of food and agricultural systems and the preservation of natural resources and ecosystems under the stress of climate change factors. The importance of support for research and development regarding technology adoption and innovation must be emphasized. The provision of data and information on food and agriculture systems and of the necessary technical and technological assistance to countries that are working to encourage the use of technology in agriculture and make it available to all producers, including small ones, is vital to avoid widening the technology gap that will inevitably increase inequality among farmers and producers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For years Lebanon has witnessed a series of overlapping crises, most recently an unprecedented financial-economic crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the catastrophic Beirut Port explosion in August 2020, as well as a refugee crisis with Lebanon continuing to host about 1.5 million displaced persons. These combined crises have put great pressure on all aspects of the economy and society, including the agriculture and food sectors. Food security has been particularly affected. More than 50 percent of the population of Lebanon risks not being able to meet basic

food needs because of shortages in foodstuffs and steep price rises. With inflation running at 400 percent there has been a significant decline in people's purchasing power and, as a consequence, their ability to obtain food. The Beirut Port disaster caused severe damage to grain silos, which were almost completely destroyed, and this led to a reduction in reserves of flour. The economic depression in Lebanon has resulted in an unprecedented 25-percent fall in GDP while the poverty rate has risen to more than 55 percent (including 23 percent in extreme poverty) and the unemployment rate has risen sharply to around 40 percent.

To meet the requirements of this critical stage the government has taken a series of emergency and immediate intervention initiatives and measures within available capacity and for specific periods. The most important of these are support for the social safety net and improved access to social services. Lebanon currently relies on imports to secure more than 80 percent of its needs, therefore subsidies must be directed towards essential and raw materials, including imported agricultural inputs, and food products.

The financial and economic crisis has exacerbated pre-existing problems at the level of the food and agriculture sector. Rapid intervention is required to revive and boost the livelihoods of farmers, increase production capacity, enhance resilience in the short term and act to support agriculture food systems transformation in the medium and long term.

The Lebanon National Agriculture Strategy 2020–2025, which was launched at the end of 2020, reflects this trend. The Strategy aims to transform agriculture food systems so they become more inclusive, competitive and sustainable, and gives priority at this stage to ensuring the viability of the livelihoods of small farmers and producers, the main source of which is agriculture and food. At the same time, the Strategy focuses on increasing public investment and incentivizing private investment in the food, agriculture and related sectors, as well as increasing job opportunities for young people and women in rural areas, encouraging the adoption of technology and digital agriculture, promoting cooperative work, and making it easier for farmers and small and medium enterprises to access tools and financial facilities commensurate with the requirements of this critical stage.

Mr Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bringing about the required transformation “from strategy to action” in food and agriculture systems to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals is the opportunity of today. In order to turn opportunities into achievements, we still need greater commitment at the level of political decision-making and more enhanced partnerships and combined efforts between all, especially between countries and with regional and international organizations, donor countries, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The mobilization of funding and resources is key to enhancing crisis-response capacity, and there must be particular attention to the issue of food

security and to enabling rapid response to the needs of the most crisis-ridden and crisis-affected countries in order to foster inclusivity and achieve justice and equality.

Finally, we must thank and commend the FAO and His Excellency the Director-General, Dr Qu Dongyu, for their efforts to achieve sustainable agricultural and food development. Permit me to note in particular the vital role of the organization in supporting Lebanon in facing its successive crises, whether through the implementation of emergency projects or through coordination with donors. We look forward to strengthening this partnership to secure additional resources and expand the range of emergency interventions and agricultural projects to reach all farmers, women and men, most impacted by crises and in all parts of Lebanon.

Thank you for your kind attention.