

**NERC/08/REP  
March 2008**

**REPORT OF THE  
TWENTY-NINTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE  
FOR THE NEAR EAST**

**Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt, 1-5 March 2008**

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
FAO Regional Office for the Near East**

**Cairo 2008**

### *Date and place of FAO Regional Conferences for the Near East*

First	- Cairo, Egypt, 2-14 February 1948
Second	- Bloudane, Syria, 28 August - 6 September 1951
Third	- Cairo, Egypt, 1-9 September 1953
Fourth	- Damascus, Syria*, 10-20 December 1958
Fifth	- Tehran, Iran, 21 September - 1 October 1960
Sixth	- Tel Amara, Lebanon, 30 July - 8 August 1962
Seventh	- Cairo, Egypt**, 19-31 October 1964
Eighth	- Khartoum, Sudan, 24 January - 2 February 1967
Ninth	- Baghdad, Iraq, 21 September - 1 October 1968
Tenth	- Islamabad, Pakistan, 12-22 September 1970
Eleventh	- Kuwait, Kuwait, 9-19 September 1972
Twelfth	- Amman, Jordan, 31 August - 9 September 1974
Thirteenth	- Tunis, Tunisia, 4-11 October 1976
Fourteenth	- Damascus, Syria, 9-16 September 1978
Fifteenth	- Rome, Italy, 21-25 April 1981
Sixteenth	- Nicosia, Cyprus, 25-29 October 1982
Seventeenth	- Aden, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, 11-15 March 1984
Eighteenth	- Istanbul, Turkey, 17-21 March 1986
Nineteenth	- Muscat, Oman, 13-17 March 1988
Twentieth	- Tunis, Tunisia, 12-16 March 1990
Twenty-first	- Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 17-21 May 1992
Twenty-second	- Amman, Jordan, 3-6 July 1994
Twenty-third	- Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, 26-29 March 1996
Twenty-fourth	- Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, 21-25 March 1998
Twenty-fifth	- Beirut, Lebanon, 20-24 March 2000
Twenty-sixth	- Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 9-13 March 2002
Twenty-seventh	- Doha, State of Qatar, 13-17 March 2004
Twenty-eighth	- Sana'a, Republic of Yemen, 12-16 March 2006
Twenty-ninth	- Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt, 1-5 March 2008

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\* Known as the United Arab Republic from 01/03/1958 to 28/09/1961.

\*\* Known as the United Arab Republic until 02/09/1971.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
<b>SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	i-vii
	<u>Paragraphs</u>
<b>I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS</b>	
– Organization of the Conference	1
– Inaugural Ceremony	2-17
– Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur	18-19
– Adoption of the Agenda	20
<b>II. STATEMENTS</b>	
– Statement by the Director-General	21
– Matters Arising from the 34 <sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference	22-25
<b>III. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION</b>	
– Round Table Discussion on “Climate Change: Implications for Agriculture in the Near East”	26-34
– Report of the Senior Officers Meeting	35
– Global and Regional Emergency Issues	36-40
– Report on FAO Activities in the Near East Region with a Focus on the Achievement of the World Food Summit (WFS) Target and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)	41-42
– General Recommendations	43-48
<b>IV. OTHER MATTERS</b>	
– Proposed List of Topics to be Considered at the 30 <sup>th</sup> Regional Conference for the Near East	49
<b>V. CONCLUDING ITEMS</b>	
– Date and Place of the Thirtieth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East	50
– Adoption of the Report	51
– Closure of the Conference	52-56
	<u>Pages</u>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
A. Agenda	12
B. List of Participants	14
C. List of Documents	38
D. Statement by the FAO Director-General	39
E. The Senior Officers Meeting Report	43

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made by the Twenty-ninth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East were as follows:

### **1. General Recommendations**

- The Conference noted with concern the incidence of the new race of the Black Stem Rust of wheat known as Ug99. Therefore, the Conference **urged** Member States to allocate adequate resources to control this serious disease and to develop of disease-resistant wheat varieties; and **requested** FAO to provide the necessary technical support within the framework of the *Global Rust Initiative* recently launched by FAO in collaboration with ICARDA and other concerned organizations.
- The Conference was informed that 12 countries have already agreed to establish the *Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA)*; therefore, the Conference **requested** FAO to continue its efforts for the establishment of this proposed Commission.
- The Conference commended FAO for its assistance to Syria, Jordan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in formulating strategies and action plans for drought mitigation and early warning and **requested** FAO to extend this positive experience to other countries in the Region.
- The Conference **called upon** Member States to increase their investments in agriculture in the Region and **requested** FAO to provide Member States with related technical assistance.

### **2. Round Table Discussion on “Climate Change: Implications for Agriculture in the Near East”**

#### **2.1. *For the Attention of Member States***

The Conference **called upon** Member States of the Region to:

- promote agriculture as a key player in the reduction of atmospheric greenhouse gases, including building the capacity of agricultural personnel and decision-makers;
- develop policies and legislation to enhance natural resource management practices that can lead to mitigation and adaptations to climate change;

- consider collection, exchange and dissemination of geo-referenced and tabular climate-change data and statistics to monitor soil carbon, and overall *carbon accounting*;
- identify activities with the potential to mitigate emissions of greenhouse gases, increase the resilience of production systems against vagaries of the current climate and the threats of climate change, and improve adaptation capacities;
- optimize the utilization of genetic engineering tools to develop heat and drought tolerant crop varieties in collaboration among countries of the Region and with FAO and other relevant international specialized organizations; and
- support international efforts to reduce the magnitude of climate change and to urge the signatories of the *Kyoto Agreement* to abide by its clauses and to call upon those States that have not yet signed this Agreement to sign it.

## **2.2 For the attention of FAO**

The Conference **requested** FAO to:

- prepare studies specific to the Region that would examine the possible impact of climate change on agriculture, food security and natural resources at the regional and national levels;
- assist member countries in the identification, development and promotion of practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or sequester carbon, while contributing to sustainable development;
- work with concerned international, regional and national organizations to improve the use of tools to assess the impact of weather conditions on crops (crop yield forecasting), the use of weather and climate forecasts in farm-level decision-making;
- provide technical assistance to member countries to study how small farmers could benefit from opportunities within the framework of the *Clean Development Mechanism* (including *carbon tax*); and
- promote integration of climate change, biodiversity conservation, and desertification control into natural resources management programmes and activities in the Region.

### **3. Report of the Senior Officers Meeting**

The Conference **adopted** the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting with the following recommendations:

#### **3.1 Near East Agriculture towards 2050: Prospects and Challenges**

##### **3.1.1 *For the attention of Member States***

The Meeting **called upon** Member States of the Region to:

- use the preliminary results presented in this study (especially for 2030) as a starting point to develop their own more detailed country studies based on available data and local expertise. Local multidisciplinary experts should review the underlying assumptions regarding the various projection parameters to ensure that they accurately reflect local conditions;
- hold national expert consultations, with the participation of international experts (including FAO), to review country-level assumptions and results. This could also be expanded to the conduct of comprehensive national studies that would involve a more exhaustive data collection exercise and provide a more solid base for future projections; and
- invest in agricultural production projects in countries of the Region that are endowed with adequate natural resources, such as Sudan, Libya and others.

##### **3.1.2 *For the attention of FAO***

The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- ensure that future versions of this study include further analyses regarding alternative policy scenarios and their implications on the Region and to cover additional aspects such as the impact of political uncertainty in some parts of the Region and the implications of the increased consumption of animal products on the limited rangeland and water resources;
- support, within its available resources, member countries that might be interested in developing more detailed country studies of the prospects for their agricultural sectors by 2030 or 2050. This would include extending the country coverage to other Near East countries not included in this study, provided the necessary country-level data are available; and
- organize regional expert consultations on key policy issues highlighted by this study. Studying the implications of the rapid expansion of bioenergy use and of climate change on agricultural and food policies should receive a high priority.

### ***3.2. Socio-Economic Impacts of Transboundary Animal Diseases (TADs) in the Near East with Particular Emphasis on Avian Influenza***

#### ***3.2.1 For the attention of Member States***

The Meeting **called upon** Member States of the Region to:

- consider establishing mechanisms to encourage coordination among neighboring and trading countries in order to achieve TAD management, with all member countries developing and rehearsing contingency plans, including communication plans, to reduce the impact of disease incursions and reduce market shocks;
- increase the use of risk assessment procedures and multilateral decision-making, following WTO rules, particularly in terms of acceptable procedures for closure and penning of animal product movements;
- develop closer public-private partnerships to regulate and enforce legislation across the marketing chains to facilitate production of affordable and safe food; and
- strengthen national livestock statistics, including trade and animal diseases and to consider establishing a regional TADs early warning system through sharing this information with other Near East and neighboring countries and with concerned international organizations, such as the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

#### ***3.2.2 For the attention of FAO***

The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- facilitate analysis of sector trends in updating disease control plans that reflect reports and statistical material developed by FAO and to always use the same regional and sub-regional geographic country coverage classifications;
- increase efforts to share expertise in contingency planning with Member States and support sharing of plans among all countries within the Region, so outbreaks can be contained quickly and with minimal socio-economic damage;
- support member countries in conducting national and regional risk assessments of TAD spread, including support to human capacity building and training; and
- assist member countries to setting clear performance targets in order to develop a level of animal disease control that will safeguard human and animal health and wealth.

### **3.3. Report on the Outcomes of the Regional Commissions and Other Relevant Regional Meetings in the Near East**

The Meeting adopted the report of the 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the *Agriculture, Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East (ALAWUC)*, and recommended that the list of proposed future topics should be reduced to the following:

- 1) Status of non-conventional water resources use and water recycling in the Near East, including:
  - Reuse of treated wastewater in agriculture: *Situation, Constraints and Prospects for Improvement*;
  - New developments in the use of brackish water for agricultural production in the Near East;
- 2) Land issues
  - Status of the use and management of fertilizers in the Near East Region and proposals for improvement
  - Land Tenure Issues in the Near East: *Situation and Impacts on Land Management*;
- 3) Climate change and drought, including:
  - Impacts of climate change on water and crop production
  - Capacity building on drought monitoring and early warning systems for drought preparedness and impact mitigation;
- 4) Role of agro-climatic zoning in optimizing agricultural water use under water-scarcity conditions;
- 5) Research progress in the areas of crop water-stress tolerance and salt tolerance

The Meeting called upon all the other concerned Regional Commissions and relevant Regional Meetings to take into consideration the various issues raised by the Meeting in their future work.

## **4. Global and Regional Emergency Issues**

Regarding FAO's emergency and rehabilitation programmes in the Near East Region, the Conference **requested** FAO to:

- pay particular attention to requirements for capacity building;
- continue to coordinate closely with other UN agencies;
- strengthen capacity for plant pest emergency management and animal diseases;



- place more emphasis on the establishment of early warning systems;
- closely monitor the impact of emergency intervention programmes;
- broaden its consultation with the national sectoral authorities/departments concerned in the implementation of FAO emergency projects in Iraq; and
- accelerate moves to re-establish a presence within Iraq, in coordination with other UN agencies

**5. Proposed List of Topics to be Considered at the 30<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference for the Near East**

The Conference formed a committee, consisting of representatives of four Member States (Egypt, Libya, Oman and Saudi Arabia) plus a member of the FAO Secretariat, to assist in collecting proposed topics by member countries and to prepare a list of topics for consideration by the Regional Conference. The Conference reviewed the various topics compiled by the committee and **requested** the Secretariat to submit the approved condensed list of topics (shown below) to FAO/HQ for consideration and possible inclusion in the Conference Agenda for the 30<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference for the Near East:

- 1) Trans-boundary plant pests and diseases with emphasis on the Black Stem Rust (Ug99);
- 2) Water desalination for agricultural use;
- 3) Climate change and natural resource management in the Near East:
  - a. Model assessments at national and regional levels
  - b. Mitigation and adaptation measures;
- 4) Valuing rangelands for their ecosystem and livelihood services: holistic analysis including their role in carbon sequestration and carbon tax;
- 5) Knowledge and information management networks/systems for rural and agricultural development in the Near East : recent experiences and lessons learned;
- 6) Agricultural research for development: institutions, resource as well as regional and global experience.

**6. Date and Place of the 30<sup>th</sup> FAO Regional Conference for the Near East**

The Conference welcomed the invitation extended by the *Government of Sudan* to host the Thirtieth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. The Conference **requested** that the Director-General of FAO takes this submission into consideration when deciding on the date and place of the coming Conference, in consultation with Member Governments of the Region.

## **I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS**

### **Organization of the Conference**

1. The Twenty-ninth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East was held in Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt, from 1 to 5 March 2008 at the kind invitation of the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt. The Conference was attended by 140 delegates from 22 countries, and 26 observers. The list of participants is given as Appendix B to this Report.

### **Inaugural Ceremony**

2. The Inaugural Ceremony was attended by representatives of member countries, observers, high-ranking state officials, heads and representatives of diplomatic missions in the Arab Republic of Egypt, representatives of UN and Regional organizations and representatives from the media.

3. The Conference was inaugurated by His Excellency Mr. Amin Abaza, Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on behalf of His Excellency Dr. Ahmad Nazif, the Prime Minister of the Arab Republic of Egypt. The Conference was addressed by Prof. Mohammed Saeid Noori-Naeni, the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, as well as by Dr. Jacques Diouf, the FAO Director-General.

4. Prof. Naeni began his statement by highlighting the unique sense of history and the feeling of an ancient and a modern civilization which is embodied in the name of Egypt. He pointed out the increasing concerns related to the recent sharp rise in the prices of agricultural commodities. He provided an overview of the main supply and demand factors responsible for this phenomenon, referring to the main challenges it is posing for food security at the national and household levels, and some of the proposed short- and long-term measures to address its negative implications.

5. Referring to the Independent External Evaluation of FAO (IEE), Prof. Naeni recalled that the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference appointed him as Chair of the Conference Committee whose functions are to recommend to the special session of the Conference in November 2008 proposals for the immediate plan of action and to provide on-going review and feedback on the implementation of actions being undertaken by the Organization. He pointed out that the IEE report contains many worthwhile proposals including the recommendation for an enhanced role for regional conferences in FAO's decision making. Prof. Naeni expressed his hope that this Conference will take this opportunity to provide both impetus and important views to be considered in the IEE-Follow-up process.

6. Prof. Naeni concluded his statement by stressing that a lot can be learnt from the Region's past history and civilization and we should try to make good use of it and combine it with the achievements of contemporary civilizations, in our endeavors to make the world a more safe, prosperous and pleasant place for all.

7. Dr. Jacques Diouf, the FAO Director-General, expressed his profound gratitude to His Excellency Mohamed Hosny Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and to the Government and people of Egypt for their warm welcome and hospitality. He started his statement by reviewing the latest data on food insecurity in the World, noting that it was troublesome to see that the trend in the number of hungry people is not declining at the envisaged pace. Collectively, the countries of the Near East Regional Conference mirror the global situation.

8. The Director-General noted that, beyond the difficulties of conflicts, new challenges have emerged over the last few years: the inadequacy of food stocks and climate change, whose negative impacts are felt on agricultural production. The rapid increase in food prices, particularly dairy and grain, is posing both threats for global and regional food security. The price increase has been driven by a complex mix of factors including unusual weather events, the use of food commodities for the production of biofuels, as well as structural changes of food demand in developing countries.

9. To examine the dimensions posed by these new challenges, the Director-General informed the Conference of his recent initiative to introduce urgent measures to support the most affected countries and to protect the poor against escalating food prices. FAO would finance, from its own resources and from resources made available by member countries, a model programme of intervention aimed at enhancing the access to inputs of poor farmers in the low-income food-deficit countries in order to urgently boost local food production. Governments, international institutions and bilateral development agencies are encouraged to broaden this initiative in order to prevent further food crises.

10. The Director-General also informed the Conference that FAO will be hosting two High-level Conferences this biennium: the first on *World Food Security and the Challenges of Climate Change and Bio-energy* in June, and the second on *Feeding the World in 2050* later on. These events should enable the Heads of State and of Government and the international community to adopt policies, strategies and programmes to take up the new world challenges facing world food security and to ensure sustainable agricultural development. The Director-General underlined the importance of having the largest possible participation of member countries at the highest-level.

11. The Director-General surveyed recent trends in agricultural production in the Region. He expressed his satisfaction that member countries have achieved positive results in food and agriculture production; though he noted several constraints that need to be dealt with appropriately to achieve further progress. He pointed out that there were some 13 countries of the Region which still require emergency external assistance. In terms of value, 45 percent of world emergency and rehabilitation programmes was directed to the countries of the Near East.

12. The Director-General recalled that the Organization and its activities were scrutinized by an Independent External Evaluation (IEE) in 2006-2007. The IEE's report was presented to the Thirty-fourth Session of the Conference of FAO in November 2007. The Conference decided to develop an Immediate Action Plan and a Strategic Framework for FAO renewal, after having undertaken a systematic review of the IEE report, its findings and recommendations, and of Management's response.

13. The Director-General pointed out that the need for change had already been determined at the Thirty-third Session of the Conference of FAO in 2005 and a new organizational structure was put in place starting from 1 January 2007. In particular, this entailed the restructuring of Headquarters and the establishment of several subregional offices in Africa, Central America, Central Asia and Europe, as well as the opening of shared service centers in Budapest, Santiago and Bangkok. The Thirty-fourth Session of the Conference also approved the establishment of a subregional office for the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Yemen.

14. The Director-General concluded his statement by noting that, the increased revenues from oil exports could provide an excellent opportunity to boost public investment in agriculture and to address some of the major challenges facing agriculture in the Near East.

15. In his statement, His Excellency Mr. Abaza, welcomed all participants on behalf of His Excellency Dr. Ahmad Nazif, the Prime Minister of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and expressed his great pleasure to host this Conference in Egypt, the cradle of civilization and the meeting point of cultures. The Minister expressed his Government's pride for the constructive role that FAO is playing under the leadership of its Director-General Dr. Jacques Diouf, as well as its great appreciation for the positive collaboration between Egypt and FAO in all fields. He expressed his hope that such collaboration would further expand in order to enhance FAO's support to national efforts to attain agricultural development and food security.

16. His Excellency Mr. Abaza pointed out that this Conference was being held during a period of major developments that require an evaluation of what needs to be done to overcome the great challenges and complications facing all of us. The world, including the Near East Region, is facing natural and man-made changes that are likely to affect agriculture. Of prime importance is climate change and its negative impact on agricultural production, including declining areas of arable land, and implications on the growing seasons and crop mix. The increasing trends towards the production of biofuel and the use of essential crops by many industrial countries as fuel is likely to exacerbate the increase in the prices of food commodities. No doubt, these trends will have destructive implications on the Region's food security, especially since most countries in the Region depend on food imports.

17. The Minister concluded by pointing out that the recent developments would require serious thinking about sustainable solutions to help to adapt to these new developments and to propose policies that strengthen the Region's capacities to collectively overcome some of the challenges that are difficult to address individually. He noted that because challenges are increasingly becoming of transboundary nature, they are difficult to control without adopting joint policies to assist the Region to find the solutions needed to address them.

### **Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur**

18. His Excellency Mr. Amin Abaza, Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation in the Arab Republic of Egypt, was unanimously elected Chairperson of the Conference.

19. The Conference resolved that all other Heads of Delegations would be Vice-Chairpersons and appointed Mr. Mahmoud Al-Najdawi (Jordan), as the Conference Rapporteur.

## **Adoption of the Agenda**

20. The Conference adopted the Provisional Agenda NERC/08/1 (Appendix A) and the Timetable NERC/08/INF/2.

## **II. STATEMENTS**

### **Statement by the FAO Director-General**

21. Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, delivered his Statement to the Conference during the Inaugural Ceremony (see above). The Statement is presented in Appendix D.

### **Matters Arising from the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference**

22. Referring to the Document NERC/08/6, “Matters Arising from the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference”, the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, Prof. Naeni, provided the Conference with a short briefing about the substantive outcome of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference held in Rome on 17-24 November 2007, particularly in relation to the Report of the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of FAO.

23. Prof. Naeni pointed out the extensive information gathering and analysis carried out by the IEE, including consultations with both governmental authorities and FAO staff and covering most aspects of the Organization’s work. He expressed his appreciation for the commendable support received from FAO staff at all levels, demonstrating the willingness of FAO management and staff to engage in an open and comprehensive assessment of the Organization’s activities, challenges and the need for change.

24. Prof. Naeni recalled that the IEE report contains 109 recommendations broken down into 330 actionable subcomponents addressed to management and the governing bodies. As indicated in the Report, their implementation would require a phased process over a certain period, as well as “quick wins” for early action. He noted the establishment of a time-bound Conference Committee, chaired by Prof. Naeni, whose functions are to recommend to the special session of the Conference in November 2008 proposals for the immediate plan of action, make decisions on their budgetary implications and to provide on-going review and feedback on the implementation of actions being undertaken by FAO.

25. The Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council concluded his briefing by urging member countries to share their views and to express their opinions about the issues of priority to the Region to be considered by the Conference Committee.

### **III. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

#### **Round Table Discussion on “Climate Change: Implications for Agriculture in the Near East”**

26. The Conference took note of the Document NERC/08/INF/5 “Climate Change: Implications for Agriculture in the Near East”, which provided a brief on the potential climate change impacts in the Near East Region, based mainly on the assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other recent reports.

27. The Conference noted that the overall picture that emerges from the recent IPCC projections is best analyzed in terms of runoff – the difference between rainfall and evapotranspiration – which is related to crop water availability. Referring to the projected changes between the periods of 1980-99 and 2080-99, more than 80 percent of the models agree that most of the Region will have a decrease in water availability (expressed as runoff) of up to 40 mm per year, and that the decrease will be twice as high in the Anatolian Plateau. However, water availability could increase up to 40 mm/year from southern Algeria to southern Egypt, most of Sudan and Somalia in Africa, the southern Arabian Peninsula and the south of western Asia – although there is less agreement on these areas among models than on areas with projected water availability decrease.

28. The Conference noted with concern that water availability is expected to be highly sensitive to climate change. Agriculture in the Region accounts for 90 percent of the mobilized water resources. Many of the Region's irrigation systems are under considerable environmental strain due to salinity, water logging or overexploitation of groundwater. Groundwater, including non-renewable fossil water, is of primary importance in most countries and an additional 155 to 600 million people may suffer an increase in water stress in North Africa with a 3°C rise in temperature. Competition for water within the Region and across its borders may grow, carrying the risk of conflict. Some parts of the Region, notably the Nile Delta in Egypt and the Gulf coast of the Arabian Peninsula, are particularly vulnerable to flooding from rising sea levels.

29. Agricultural productivity in the Near East Region is likely to suffer losses because of high temperature, drought, floods and soil degradation, and crop growing may become unsustainable in some parts of the Region. Once temperature increases reach 3 or 4°C, yields of the predominant crops in the Region may fall by up to 35 percent. Declining available soil moisture will exacerbate the current situation of the already degraded rangelands resulting in an overall decline in the livestock productivity of the widespread nomadic and semi-nomadic systems in the Region. Livestock pest and disease distribution and their transmission patterns would be altered, with increased incidence of epidemics.

30. The Conference expressed its concern that by 2100, under a baseline climate change scenario, the mean cost of climate change in parts of the Near East Region, especially the Middle East, is predicted to be equivalent to around a 2.5 percent loss in GDP, compared with what could have been achieved in a world without climate change. Under a high climate change scenario, the mean cost of climate change is predicted to be 3.5 percent of GDP in Africa and the Middle East due to loss of agricultural land and/or threats to coastal cities.

31. In spite of the relatively pessimistic projections for the Region, the Conference noted that some new opportunities would most probably materialize. There are large expanses of degraded land in the Region that could be reforested, which would allow some countries to benefit from the Clean Development Mechanism that accepts afforestation and reforestation as eligible activities. Some countries in the Region such as Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt are building solid experience in afforestation and reclamation of desert areas, using sewage water for irrigation. Other emerging opportunities could include improved fertilizer use and the development of water harvesting and conservation techniques.

32. The Conference commended FAO for holding this special session to allow discussion and exchange of information in relation to the climate change and its potential impact in the Region. The Conference noted with satisfaction that FAO would convene a High-Level Conference on “World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy” in June 2008 and expressed its hope that this event will give the international community an opportunity to learn from the scientific and technical information compiled by groups of experts in order to determine the appropriate national and regional policies and strategies.

33. The Conference **called upon** Member States to:

- promote agriculture as a key player in the reduction of atmospheric greenhouse gases, including building the capacity of agricultural personnel and decision-makers;
- develop policies and legislation to enhance natural resource management practices that can lead to mitigation and adaptations to climate change;
- consider collection, exchange and dissemination of geo-referenced and tabular climate-change data and statistics to monitor soil carbon, and overall carbon accounting;
- identify activities with the potential to mitigate emissions of greenhouse gases, increase the resilience of production systems against the vagaries of climate and the threats of climate change, and improve adaptation capacities;
- optimize the utilization of genetic engineering tools to develop heat and drought tolerant crop varieties in collaboration among countries of the Region and with FAO and other relevant international specialized organizations; and
- support international efforts to reduce the magnitude of climate change and to urge the signatories of the Kyoto Agreement to abide by its clauses and to call upon those States that have not yet signed this Agreement to sign it.

34. The Conference **requested** FAO to:

- prepare studies specific to the Region that would examine the possible impact of climate change on agriculture, food security and natural resources at the regional and national levels;



- assist member countries in the identification, development and promotion of practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or sequester carbon, while contributing to sustainable development;
- work with concerned international, regional and national organizations to improve the use of tools to assess the impact of weather conditions on crops (crop yield forecasting), the use of weather and climate forecasts in farm-level decision-making;
- provide technical assistance to member countries to study how small farmers could benefit from opportunities within the framework of the Clean Development Mechanism (including *carbon tax*); and
- promote integration of climate change, biodiversity conservation, and desertification control into natural resources management programmes and activities in the Region.

### **Report of the Senior Officers Meeting**

35. The Senior Officers Meeting Report (NERC/08/SOM/REP Appendix E) was presented by the Rapporteur for consideration and adoption by the Conference. The Conference **adopted** the Report after introducing some amendments.

### **Global and Regional Emergency Issues**

36. The Conference considered Document NERC/08/5 “Global and Regional Emergency Issues”. It was noted that some 36 countries (of which 6 in the Near East Region) were currently in crises that require external assistance. Natural disasters, conflicts and diseases such as HIV/AIDS, alone or in combination, are the main drivers of these crises. The Conference expressed its satisfaction that FAO plays an important role in assisting countries in preventing, mitigating, preparing for and responding to food and agricultural emergencies. FAO’s strategy covers strengthening capacity for disaster preparedness, forecasting and providing early warning and assessing emergency needs, in addition to formulating and implementing programmes for agricultural relief and rehabilitation that favor the transition from relief to development. Activities also serve to improve analysis of underlying causes of disasters and strengthen local capacities to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience.

37. The Conference noted that FAO’s involvement in emergencies and rehabilitation has risen significantly in the past ten years, reflecting the increase in both the number and scale of crises (natural and human-induced), as well as the recognition that FAO’s expertise in farming, livestock, fisheries and forestry is crucial in emergency relief and rehabilitation efforts. It also noted that emergencies have absorbed from 40 to 50 percent of FAO’s extra-budgetary resources in recent biennia. The current emergency and rehabilitation programmes, valued at around US\$590 million, are concentrated in 40 countries experiencing food and agricultural emergencies around the world.

38. Within the Near East Region, FAO’s emergency and rehabilitation programmes are valued at US\$268 million (some 45 percent of the global value). They are being implemented in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Yemen. There are also several regional

transboundary plant pest and animal disease control programmes in the Region. The Conference expressed its satisfaction that FAO has responded to the scale and complexity of disasters in the Near East by providing technical support and coordination services to rebuild agriculture-based livelihoods in addition to seeds and tools.

39. The Conference agreed that FAO's work in emergencies deserves a high priority and that an overall strategy needs to be formulated and approved by the Governing Bodies to gain a clear mandate for those emergency functions in which FAO is strong.

40. Regarding FAO's emergency and rehabilitation programmes in the Near East Region, the Conference **requested** FAO to:

- pay particular attention to requirements for capacity building;
- continue to coordinate closely with other UN agencies;
- strengthen capacity for plant pest emergency management and animal diseases;
- place more emphasis on the establishment of early warning systems;
- closely monitor the impact of emergency intervention programmes;
- broaden its consultation with the national sectoral authorities/departments concerned with the implementation of FAO emergency projects in Iraq; and
- accelerate moves to re-establish a presence within Iraq, in coordination with other UN agencies

#### **Report on FAO Activities in the Near East Region with a Focus on the Achievement of the World Food Summit (WFS) Target and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

41. Mr. Mohamad Albraithen, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East, reviewed FAO's main activities in the Region during the 2006-2007 biennium. He focused on briefing the Conference on actions taken in response to the recommendations of the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Near East Regional Conference.

42. The Conference noted with satisfaction the wide range and comprehensiveness of FAO activities in the Region during the 2006-2007 biennium and commended FAO for taking the adequate actions in response to the recommendations of the previous Session of the Conference.

#### **General Recommendations**

43. The Conference discussed numerous issues related to other priority agricultural development and food security issues in the Region.

44. The Conference noted with concern the incidence of the new race of the black stem rust of wheat known as Ug99. Therefore, the Conference **urged** Member States to allocate adequate resources to control this serious disease and to develop disease-resistant wheat

varieties; and **requested** FAO to provide the necessary technical support within the framework of the Global Rust Initiative recently launched by FAO in collaboration with the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and other concerned organizations.

45. The Conference was informed that twelve countries have already agreed to establish the Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa (AHCNENA); therefore, the Conference **requested** FAO to continue its efforts for the establishment of this proposed Commission.

46. The Conference commended FAO for its assistance to Syria, Jordan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in formulating strategies and action plans for drought mitigation and early warning and **requested** FAO to extend this positive experience to other countries in the Region.

47. The Conference **called upon** Member States to increase their investments in agriculture in the Region and **requested** FAO to provide Member States with related technical assistance.

48. The Conference took note of the two proposals presented by the Islamic Republic of Iran, namely: (1) to establish a regional plant gene bank in Iran; and (2) to organize a regional intergovernmental working group on agricultural genetic resources. It was proposed that a committee of Member States be formed to further examine these two proposals.

#### **IV. OTHER MATTERS**

##### **Proposed List of Topics to be Considered at the 30<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference for the Near East**

49. The Conference formed a committee, consisting of representatives of four Member States (Egypt, Libya, Oman and Saudi Arabia) plus a member of the FAO Secretariat, to assist in collecting proposed topics by Member Countries and to prepare a list of topics for consideration by the Regional Conference. The Conference reviewed the various topics compiled by the committee and **requested** the Secretariat to submit the approved condensed list of topics (shown below) to FAO/HQ for consideration and possible inclusion in the Conference Agenda for the 30<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference for the Near East:

1. Trans-boundary plant pests and diseases with emphasis on the Black Stem Rust Ug99;
2. Water desalination for agricultural use;
3. Climate change and natural resource management in the Near East:
  - a. Model assessments at national and regional levels
  - b. Mitigation and adaptation measures.
4. Valuing rangelands for their ecosystem and livelihood services: holistic analysis including their role in carbon sequestration and the *carbon tax*;

5. Knowledge and information management networks/systems for rural and agricultural development in the Near East: recent experiences and lessons learned;
6. Agricultural research for development: institutions, resources as well as regional and global experiences.

## **V. CONCLUDING ITEMS**

### **Date and Place of the Thirtieth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East**

50. The Conference welcomed the invitation extended by the Government of Sudan to host the Thirtieth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. The Conference **requested** that the Director-General of FAO takes this submission into consideration when deciding on the date and place of the coming Conference, in consultation with Member Governments of the Region.

### **Adoption of the Report**

51. The Conference **adopted** the Report of the 29<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference, including the Senior Officers Meeting Report, after introducing several amendments.

### **Closure of the Conference**

52. Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, expressed his deep gratitude to His Excellency Mohamed Hosny Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and to the Government and people of Egypt for their generous hospitality. He also expressed his deepest thanks to H.E. Dr. Ahmad Nazif, the Prime Minister of Egypt, for holding the Conference under his auspices, and to H.E. Mr. Amin Abaza, Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation of Egypt for hosting the Conference and for the excellent facilities and arrangements which had contributed to the success of the Conference. The Director-General also extended his thanks and appreciation to their Excellencies the Ministers and to the Heads of Delegations for their active participation and contribution to the success of the Conference.

53. H.E. Dr. Mansour Ahmed Al-Hawshabi, Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation in the Republic of Yemen, spoke on behalf of the Delegates expressing thanks and appreciation to the Government and people of Egypt. He also commended the National Organizing Committee and the Conference Secretariat for the good preparation and smooth running of the Conference.

54. Following proposals from several Delegates, the Conference decided to send a cable of thanks to H.E. Mohamed Hosny Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, for the generous hospitality afforded to all participants of the Conference. It was also decided to send a similar cable of thanks to H.E. Dr. Ahmad Nazif, the Prime Minister of Egypt.

55. In his closing Statement, His Excellency Mr. Amin Abaza, Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation in the Arab Republic of Egypt and Chairperson of the Conference, reiterated his deep gratitude to the Director-General of FAO, to the Regional Representative and to the Conference Secretariat for their efforts in making the Conference a success. He thanked their Excellencies the Ministers and their accompanying senior officers, as well as

Heads of Delegations for their valuable contributions and views related to the Region's main concerns during the Conference deliberations.

56. The Chairperson declared the Conference closed at 16:15 hours, on Wednesday, 5 March 2008.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Revised Agenda**

#### **(A) SENIOR OFFICERS MEETING**

**1 – 3 March 2008**

#### **I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS**

1. Opening of the Senior Officers Meeting
2. Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

#### **II. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

4. Near East Agriculture towards 2050: Prospects and Challenges
5. Socio-Economic Impacts of Transboundary Animal Diseases in the Near East with Particular Emphasis on Avian Influenza
6. Report of the 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the Agriculture and Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East (ALAWUC)
7. Summary of the Recommendations of the Other Regional Commissions and Relevant Meetings in the Near East

#### **III. CONCLUDING ITEMS**

8. Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting
9. Closure of the Senior Officers Meeting

## **(B) MINISTERIAL MEETING**

**4 – 5 March 2008**

### **I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS**

1. Inaugural Ceremony
2. Election of the Chairperson, Vice–Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

### **II. STATEMENTS**

4. Statement by the FAO Director-General
5. Statement by the Independent Chairman of the FAO Council
6. Matters Arising from the 34th Session of the FAO Conference

### **III. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND DEBATES**

7. Roundtable Discussion on “Climate Change: Implications for Agriculture in the Near East”
8. Report of the Senior Officers Meeting
9. Global and Regional Emergency Issues
10. Report on FAO Activities in the Region, with a Focus on the Achievement of the World Food Summit (WFS) Target and the Millennium Development Goals

### **IV. OTHER MATTERS**

11. Proposed List of Topics to be considered at the 30<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference for the Near East

### **V. CONCLUDING ITEMS**

12. Date and Place of the 30<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference for the Near East
13. Adoption of the Report of the 29<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference for the Near East, including the Senior Officers Meeting Report
14. Closure of the Conference

قائمة بأسماء المشاركين

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

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Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation  
Arab Republic of Egypt

**الرئيس:**

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وزير الزراعة واستصلاح الأراضي  
جمهورية مصر العربية  
**نواب الرئيس:**

**Vice-Chairperson:**

All Heads of Delegations

جميع رؤساء الوفود

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Assistant Secretary General  
Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

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مساعد الأمين العام  
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**Chairperson:**

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## APPENDIX C

### Provisional List of Documents

#### Discussion Items

NERC/08/1	Provisional Annotated Agenda
NERC/08/2	Report on FAO Activities in the Region, with a Focus on the Achievement of the World Food Summit (WFS) Target and the Millennium Development Goals
NERC/08/3	Near East Agriculture towards 2050: Prospects and Challenges
NERC/08/4	Socio-Economic Impacts of Transboundary Animal Diseases in the Near East with Particular Emphasis on Avian Influenza
NERC/08/5	Global and Regional Emergency Issues
NERC/08/6	Matters Arising from the 34 <sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference.

#### Information Items

NERC/08/INF/1	Information Note
NERC/08/INF/2	Provisional Timetable
NERC/08/INF/3	Provisional List of Documents
NERC/08/INF/4	Statement by the FAO Director-General
NERC/08/INF/5	Climate Change: Implications for Agriculture in the Near East
NERC/08/INF/6	Pesticide Management in the Near East Region
NERC/08/INF/7	Reform of National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems
NERC/08/INF/8	World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2010
NERC/08/INF/9	Summary of the Recommendations of Regional Meetings and Commissions in the Near East
NERC/08/INF/10	Agricultural Marketing in the Near East: Challenges and Policy Issues

## APPENDIX D

### STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF FAO

*Mr Chairman,  
Distinguished Ministers,  
Mr Independent Chairman of the Council,  
Honourable Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

#### **(Introduction)**

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the Twenty-ninth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East in this historical city of Cairo. We are grateful to the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Excellency Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, and to his Government and the Egyptian people for hosting this Conference. On behalf of all the delegations and the staff of FAO, I should like to express our profound gratitude for the warm welcome and the generous hospitality that we have received.

*Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

#### **(State of food insecurity in the world and the Near East – latest assessment)**

In 1996, the World Food Summit (WFS) invited the Heads of State and of Government to eliminate hunger and achieve lasting food security for all. This comprehensive commitment was reaffirmed by further global agreements, notably the Millennium Summit in 2000 and the World Food Summit: *five years later* (WFS:*fyl*) in 2002.

Despite those commitments, the latest food insecurity data indicate that the downward trend in the number of hungry people has ceased. At world level, 862 million people were undernourished in 2002-2004 compared to 854 million in 2001-2003. The developing countries had an increase of 7 million undernourished people over the 823 million in the 1990-92 baseline period for the WFS commitments.

The situation in the member countries of the Regional Conference for the Near East mirrors the world situation, with more people suffering from hunger and malnutrition. Between 1990-92 and 2002-04, the prevalence of hunger increased from 13 to 15 percent of the population, while the number of undernourished people increased by 33 million to a total of 104 million people. The disparity in access to food that exists among the 32 countries of the Near East is widely known. The conflict zones in the region, notably Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Palestine and Lebanon, are serious grounds for concern.

Additional new challenges have emerged: climate change, whose negative impacts are felt in agricultural production, especially in the poorest regions and the inadequacy of food stocks. In many regions, growing demand for crops to produce biofuels and higher incomes in emerging countries, from rapid economic growth, raise food demand in quantity and quality.



Finally, the burgeoning world population and urbanization are other factors raising demand and causing food prices to rise.

Soaring agricultural prices have become a major parameter in the world food security equation. Between January 2007 and January 2008, the FAO food price index increased 47 percent. This was mainly driven by cereal products (62 percent), vegetable oils (85 percent) and dairy products (69 percent). Despite the notable increase in world cereal production projected for 2008, the prices of most cereals should remain high and some will increase further.

That is why, last December, I launched an initiative to introduce urgent measures to support the most affected countries and to protect the poor against escalating food prices. FAO will finance, from its own resources and from resources made available by member countries, a model programme of intervention aimed at enhancing the access to inputs of poor farmers in the low-income food-deficit countries in order to boost local agricultural production. We encourage governments, international institutions and bilateral development agencies to broadening this initiative in order to prevent further food crises.

*Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

That is the context in which FAO will be hosting two High-level Conferences this year: the first on *World Food Security and the Challenges of Climate Change and Bio-energy* from 3 to 5 June, and the second on *Feeding the World in 2050* from 5 to 7 November, endorsed by the Thirty-fourth Session of the Conference of FAO held in Rome from 17 to 24 November 2007. These events should enable the Heads of State and of Government and the international community to adopt policies, strategies and programmes to take up the new world challenges of food security and to ensure sustainable agricultural development. I should like to take this opportunity to underline the importance of having the highest possible representation from your respective countries.

**(Agricultural development in the Near East – recent trends)**  
***(Results)***

There have been positive results in agricultural production in the Near East since our meeting in Sanaa in 2006. The general agricultural situation has improved but remains unstable because of the highly uncertain climatic conditions. The production of cereals, the region's staple food, amounted to 180 million tonnes in 2005-2006, which was 7 percent higher than in 2003-2004.

Yet, for animal production, serious epizootics are rife in several countries of the region as well as epidemics of foot-and-mouth disease and highly pathogenic avian influenza. FAO is working with the member countries and development partners to reinforce and strengthen the region's veterinary services. The Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases has set up an avian influenza unit in Egypt. At regional level, in collaboration with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the Inter-African Bureau of Animal Resources of the African Union, we have set up Regional Animal Health Centres which will implement tailored and strengthened control programmes against avian influenza. Two offices have already been put in place in the Near East, one in Tunis and the other in Beirut.

Fisheries and aquaculture have continued to perform well in recent years. While production from capture fisheries rose modestly to 2.5 million tonnes per year, production from aquaculture increased sharply, especially in Egypt.

With regard to forestry, current production of industrial roundwood and wood products is very limited in the Near East, which is still heavily dependent on imports. In fact, the region is the main net importer of primary wood and paper products, with an import bill of US\$10 billion in 2006.

### *(Constraints)*

- Water remains the main obstacle to higher agricultural production in the region. With less than 2 percent of the world's freshwater resources but 11 percent of its population, the region's food security is dependent on extracting extra output from each drop of water. Important lessons can be learned from experiences in efficient water use, watershed management and drought mitigation strategies in a region which is dry and arid across 80 percent of its land area and has recurring water scarcity.
- Investment in agriculture, from both domestic and external sources, remains low in most countries of the region. In the Near East, as in other developing regions, overall external assistance to agriculture has been falling since 1995. If we exclude the oil exporting countries, external assistance to agriculture dropped 27 percent between 1995 and 2004. It is crucial that governments forge ambitious policies to raise agriculture's share of total expenditures. It would also be desirable for the countries of OPEC – the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries –, which account for 17 percent of total regional aid to the agricultural sector, to increase their support by allocating more funds to agriculture.
- As for the development of fisheries and aquaculture, the main concerns are post-harvest handling, storage and sanitation. These difficulties continue to restrict the export potential of fishery products. The overexploitation of regional fish stocks is another problem. A major challenge remains fisheries management in compliance with regulations governing the sustainable use of these resources in the framework of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.
- Forests and woodland occupy a relatively small land area in comparison to other regions. The region accounts for only 3.2 percent of global forest cover, its share amounting to 126 million hectares, half in the Sudan alone. Twenty-six countries have a forest cover of less than 10 percent of their total land area. Despite efforts to establish forest plantations in certain countries, the region as a whole is estimated to have incurred a net loss of 9 million hectares of forest in the last 15 years, equivalent to 7 percent of the 1990 total forest area.

### *(Emergencies)*

Some 13 countries of the region still require external assistance. Natural disasters, conflicts and transboundary animal diseases are the principal causes of crisis situations in the Near East. To deal with the scale and complexity of these disasters, FAO is providing technical support and coordination services, and the seeds and tools needed to restore

agricultural livelihoods. In terms of value, 45 percent of world emergency and rehabilitation programmes is directed to the countries of the Near East. Interventions have been hampered by recurring conflict, civil strife and other forms of human insecurity, often exacerbated by natural disasters.

### **(Issues on the agenda of the Regional Conference)**

*Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

In accordance with your recommendations, especially at Sanaa, this conference will give you an opportunity to participate in the debate on climate change and its implications for agriculture in the Near East. You will be briefed on FAO's activities in the region and you will have a chance to examine the emergency situations that are affecting millions of people in the region.

The Conference will also review the outlook for agriculture and food security in the region and will keep the authorities informed of the main outcomes of the Thirty-fourth Session of the Conference of FAO held in Rome from 17 to 24 November 2007 in particular.

### **(Thirty-fourth Conference of FAO)**

In 2006-2007, the Organization and its activities were scrutinized by an Independent External Evaluation (IEE). The evaluation team concentrated on four main areas: i) technical activities; ii) management and organizational issues; iii) governance; iv) FAO's role in the multilateral system. The IEE's report was presented to the Thirty-fourth Session of the Conference of FAO in November 2007. The Conference decided to develop an Immediate Action Plan and a Strategic Framework for FAO renewal, after having undertaken a systematic review of the IEE report, its findings and recommendations, and of Management's response.

The need for change had already been determined at the Thirty-third Session of the Conference of FAO in 2005 and a new organizational structure was put in place starting from 1 January 2007. In particular, this entailed the restructuring of Headquarters and the establishment of several subregional offices in Africa, Central America, Central Asia and Europe, as well as the opening of shared service centres in Budapest, Santiago and Bangkok. The Thirty-fourth Session of the Conference also approved the establishment of a subregional office for the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Yemen.

### **(Global and regional issues and challenges)**

In the medium- and long-term, agriculture in the Near East will face major challenges that include:

- Water shortages: despite improved water use and more effective irrigation thanks to advances in technology, results remain inadequate.
- Climate change: the limited availability of arable land renders local agriculture very vulnerable. A study by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) points

to a decrease in water availability in much of the territory, which will translate as significantly lower yields of key crops.

- Soaring world food prices and their implications for food security in the region. Strategic policies and decisions in this domain need to be based on careful analysis of the agricultural situation and of the land and water resources of the countries concerned.
- Land degradation constitutes a major environmental problem in the Near East. It is important to highlight the protection and stabilization role of forests and trees.
- Globalization and trade liberalization are other major challenges in a fiercely competitive global market environment.
- The threat of avian influenza remains real and calls for closer vigilance. New strains of other animal diseases have emerged in the region, including zoonoses capable of passing from animals to humans.

Despite these challenges and the intense efforts required to deal with them, there are also elements that are positive:

- increased revenues from oil exports could provide an excellent opportunity to boost public investment in agriculture.
- strategies and techniques to rationalize water use in agriculture.
- opportunities for the export of high-value agriculture products within the region, towards the EU and other international markets.
- more sustainable agricultural production practices taking into account food safety and environmental issues.
- better management of extensive rangelands, essential for the control of desertification and loss of biodiversity.

*Mr Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

As part of the ongoing FAO reform, multidisciplinary teams are being put in place at subregional level.

This Twenty-ninth Regional Conference will have to address the region's challenges. For its part, FAO will continue to support governments and regional partners in formulating and implementing effective programmes. We need to act together in ensuring sustainable rural and agricultural development, the cornerstone of food security in the region. It is thus with eager anticipation that I await the outcome of your deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you every success in your work.

**TWENTY-NINTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE  
FOR THE NEAR EAST**

**REPORT OF THE  
SENIOR OFFICERS MEETING**

**Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt, 1-3 March 2008**

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
Regional Office for the Near East**

**Cairo 2008**

## **I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS**

### **Organization of the Meeting**

1. The Senior Officers Meeting of the Twenty-ninth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East was held from 1 to 3 March 2008 in Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt.

### **Inaugural Ceremony**

2. The Meeting was inaugurated by Dr. Saad Nassar, Advisor to the Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation in the Arab Republic of Egypt, on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Amin Abaza, Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation. The Meeting was also addressed by Mr. Mohamad Albraithen, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East. In attendance, there were 60 delegates from 21 countries and 32 observers. The Meeting was also attended by several host country senior officers, representatives of UN and other International and Regional Organizations, representatives of diplomatic missions in the Arab Republic of Egypt, representatives of Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations and representatives from the news media. The list of participants is given as Appendix B.

3. Mr. Albraithen, in his opening statement, expressed his thanks and appreciation for the people and Government of Egypt for their warm welcome and hospitality. He pointed out that this was the fourth time that the Regional Conference would be held in Egypt, sixty years after the First Session of the Conference was held in Cairo in February 1948. Mr. Albraithen thanked H.E. the Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation for his participation in the inauguration of the Meeting and for all the efforts exerted by the Ministry and the National Organizing Committee, as well as the excellent arrangements and facilities provided for the success of the Meeting. Mr. Albraithen also thanked the senior officers and representatives of Member Countries and International and Regional Organizations for their attendance.

4. The Regional Representative stressed the role of the Senior Officers Meeting as an integral part of the Regional Conference and as a preparatory forum for an in-depth discussion of technical issues of concern to the Near East. Mr. Albraithen reviewed the Agenda of the Meeting and expressed his hope that the Meeting would reach positive and concrete recommendations for adoption by the Ministerial Meeting. He pointed out that the directives and recommendations of the Conference will constitute the basis of the programme of work of FAO and its Regional Office in the Region during the coming two years. He also stressed the importance of the high-level conference that FAO will convene in June 2008 to address issues related to bioenergy and to climate change.

5. In his opening statement, Dr. Nassar expressed his sincere thanks to FAO and its Regional Office for the Near East for convening the FAO Regional Conference in Egypt, the meeting point of civilizations. He reviewed the main challenges facing countries of the Region in the agriculture, water and environment sectors, including limited water resources, desertification, conservation of biodiversity and the control of transboundary animal diseases. H.E. the Advisor to the Minister reiterated Egypt's continued commitment to the World Food Summit Plan of Action and to the Millennium Development Goals, especially the alleviation of poverty.

6. Dr. Nassar noted that, in order to enhance food security in Egypt, the Government has formulated a comprehensive agricultural development strategy for the optimal utilization of land and water resources and of technology to achieve an average agricultural growth rate of 4% per year. Efforts are focusing on increasing crop productivity per unit of land and water, rationalizing the use of water in irrigation, implementing integrated pest management, enhancing agricultural processing activities, encouraging further investments in agricultural research, extension and marketing and support to increased participation of rural women. Dr. Nassar noted that the government has recently increased some agricultural producer prices to encourage farmers to increase their productivity and total output in light of the increase in international agricultural commodity prices.

7. Dr. Nassar concluded by expressing his high expectations from the Senior Officers Meeting to provide the appropriate recommendations to the Ministerial Meeting.

### **Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur**

8. The Meeting unanimously elected His Excellency Dr. Saad Nassar, Advisor to the Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation in the Arab Republic of Egypt, as its Chairperson and resolved that all other Heads of Delegations for the Senior Officers Meeting would be Vice-Chairpersons. Dr. Mahmoud Al-Najdawi (Jordan) was appointed Rapporteur.

### **Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable**

9. The Provisional Annotated Agenda (NERC/08/1) and Timetable (NERC/08/INF/2) were adopted with no modifications.

## **II. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

### **Near East Agriculture towards 2050: Prospects and Challenges**

10. The Meeting considered Document NERC/08/3, "Near East Agriculture towards 2050: Prospects and Challenges". It recalled that the 28<sup>th</sup> FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, held in Sanaa, Yemen, in March 2006, requested FAO to "... conduct a prospective study that would outline the expected long-term changes in the global economic environment and their anticipated impact on agricultural development and food security in the Region." The Meeting commended FAO for following up on this recommendation and for the high technical quality of the document.

11. The Meeting noted with concern that the Region's population would continue to grow faster than that of the rest of the world in the years ahead. This notwithstanding, it was observed that the global demographic slowdown was also present in several countries of the Region (Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Iran) with population growth rates falling to less than 0.5 percent p.a. by 2050. However, other countries of the Region were projected to continue having growth rates exceeding 1 percent p.a., even by 2050 (Yemen, Somalia).

12. The Meeting examined the trends in food consumption, noting that several countries in the Region have reached fairly high level of food consumption (more than 3300 kcal/person/day). This suggests that the growth of aggregate food demand will be lower than

in the past. The slowdown in the growth of aggregate demand for food will be most pronounced for cereals because several countries already have per capita consumption in the high range 200-260 kg/person/year. Consumption of meat may grow from the current average of 24 kg/person/year (carcass weight) to 39 kg (mostly poultry meat) during the projection period. The consumption of milk and dairy products is expected to rise from 75 kg/person/day (liquid milk equivalent) in 2001-03 to 105 kg by 2050. The per capita food consumption for vegetable oils in the Region has remained unchanged (at 14 kg/person/year) in the past 15 years and is not expected to exceed this level over the projection period. Concerning sugar, the current per capita consumption of the Region is at 28 kg/year and may grow to 33 kg.

13. Agricultural production in the Region is projected to more than double between 2001/03 and 2050. In spite of this noticeable increase in the volume of production, in terms of annual growth rates this would imply a considerable slowdown from the 3.1 percent growth of the last 15 years (1990-2005) to 1.9 and 1.4 percent over the periods 2005-30 and 2030-50 respectively. The share of livestock production in total production would continue to rise to about 45 percent by 2050 reflecting a shift in demand towards preferred goods, in particular meat and dairy products.

14. Falling self-sufficiency ratios in conjunction with rising overall demand will translate into even faster rising import volumes in absolute terms. In 1990 prices, the overall agricultural imports of the fifteen countries covered by this document will essentially double from about US\$18 billion in 2003/05 to US\$37 billion in 2050. Crops will account for the lion's share of the imports, reaching an overall import volume of US\$30 billion by 2050.

15. Given the current move to find alternatives to fossil energy, including the growing importance of bio-energy and the parallel increase in food and energy prices, some countries will face a *double burden* of rising food and oil import costs for their current account balance.

16. In addition to the long-term projections, the Meeting discussed at length the recent sharp increases in international food prices and expressed its grave concern about the impact of these increases on the Region's food security and on the nutritional status of the most vulnerable and underprivileged segments of society.

17. The Meeting **called upon** Member States of the Region to:

- use the preliminary results presented in this study (especially for 2030) as a starting point to develop their own more detailed country studies based on available data and local expertise. Local multidisciplinary experts should review the underlying assumptions regarding the various projection parameters to ensure that they accurately reflect local conditions;
- hold national expert consultations, with the participation of international experts (including FAO), to review country-level assumptions and results. This could also be expanded to the conduct of full-blown national studies that would involve a more comprehensive data collection exercise and provide a more solid base for future projections; and
- invest in agricultural production projects in some countries of the Region that are endowed with adequate natural resources, such as Sudan, Libya and others.



18. The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- ensure that future versions of this study include further analyses regarding alternative policy scenarios and their implications on the Region and to cover additional aspects such as the impact of political uncertainty in some parts of the Region and the implications of the increased consumption of animal products on the limited rangeland and water resources;
- support, within its available resources, member countries that might be interested in developing more detailed country studies of the prospects for their agricultural sectors by 2030 or 2050. This would include extending the country coverage to other Near East countries not included in this study, provided the necessary country-level data are available; and
- organize regional expert consultations on key policy issues highlighted by this study. Studying the implications of the rapid expansion of bioenergy use and of climate change on agricultural and food policies should receive a high priority.

#### **Socio-Economic Impacts of Transboundary Animal Diseases in the Near East with Particular Emphasis on Avian Influenza**

19. The Meeting examined Document NERC/08/4, “Socio-Economic Impacts of Transboundary Animal Diseases in the Near East with Particular Emphasis on Avian Influenza” and deliberated at length on various issues related to the impacts of transboundary animal diseases (TADs).

20. The Meeting noted that outbreaks of animal diseases in the Near East Region have direct and indirect impacts on livelihoods and markets. To ensure that the response is proportionate to the potential impact of the disease, prevention and control measures need to consider socio-economic and market impact and how socio-economic factors can influence the scale and spread of a disease. For example, trade in livestock is an important factor in the spread of many diseases and, therefore, understanding livestock trade patterns can be a powerful means for identifying where animal disease prevention and control interventions will be most effective.

21. The Meeting recognized that the impacts of TADs should be examined in light of the increasing demand for livestock products in the Region and the need to have a stable supply of affordable and safe livestock products. These diseases can have many different kinds of impacts: impact of the diseases themselves, in terms of death of animals and reduction in production; impact in terms of the costs of disease control; and impact on markets, leading to losses due to trading restrictions or the fear of consumers to buy and consume livestock products. Zoonotic diseases, like avian influenza, may also have direct and indirect impacts on human health.

22. The Meeting noted with concern that the majority of the countries in the Near East Region are net importers of livestock and livestock products. For sure, the animal health status of a region that is reliant on large quantities of livestock imports ultimately reflects the animal health status of the countries that it imports from. Lack of mechanisms to guarantee

health of imported livestock can put local production systems and their associated livestock supply chains at risk. This implies continued risks of disease introductions from exporting countries. For example, foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) demonstrates that these risks are high for the Region and the spread of the disease within the Region is known to occur.

23. It was also noted that the Region will have increasing dependence on livestock production units (poultry and possibly dairy) of a commercial scale, which also present risks. If large commercial units become infected, they can contaminate the surrounding environment and, if these units are linked directly or indirectly to other geographically dispersed animal populations, an animal disease epidemic can quickly expand.

24. The Meeting recognized that improved livestock production, health and general policies are required to encourage investment in biosecurity measures at farm and livestock-product supply chain levels, particularly for commercial livestock production systems. If these measures are not taken, TAD surveillance, prevention and control will continue to be difficult to achieve. This makes livestock supply chains very vulnerable to TAD outbreaks and puts the supply of affordable and safe livestock products at risk. The impacts of such vulnerability will be felt strongly by small-scale rural producers and the relatively poor urban consumers who are reliant on inexpensive livestock products to maintain a balanced diet, but who have limited safety nets.

25. The Meeting **called upon** Member States of the Region to:

- consider establishing mechanisms to encourage coordination among neighboring and trading countries in order to achieve TAD management, with all member countries developing and rehearsing contingency plans, including communication plans, to reduce the impact of disease incursions and reduce market shocks;
- increase the use of risk assessment procedures and multilateral decision-making, following WTO rules, particularly in terms of acceptable procedures for closure and penning of animal product movements;
- develop closer public-private partnerships to regulate and enforce legislation across the marketing chains to facilitate production of affordable and safe food; and
- strengthen national livestock statistics, including trade and animal diseases and to consider establishing a regional TADs early warning system through sharing this information with other Near East and neighboring countries and with concerned international organizations, such as the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE);

26. The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- facilitate analysis of sector trends in updating disease control plans that reflect reports and statistical material developed by FAO and to always use the same regional and sub-regional geographic country coverage classifications;
- increase efforts to share expertise in contingency planning with Member States and support sharing of plans among all countries within the Region, so outbreaks can be contained quickly and with minimal socio-economic damage;

- support member countries in conducting national and regional risk assessments of TAD spread, including support to human capacity building and training; and
- assist member countries to setting clear performance targets in order to develop a level of animal disease control that will safeguard human and animal health and wealth.

### **Report on the Outcomes of the Regional Commissions and Other Relevant Regional Meetings in the Near East**

27. The Meeting reviewed the Report of the 5<sup>th</sup> Session the Agriculture, Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East (ALAWUC), which met from 26 to 28 February 2008 in Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt. Following thorough examination and discussion, the Meeting **adopted** the Report and **recommended** that the list of proposed future topics should be reduced to include only priority issues and to eliminate topics covered in past sessions of ALAWUC and of the Regional Conference. These priority topics are as follows:

- 6) Status of non-conventional water resources use and water recycling in the Near East
  - Reuse of treated wastewater in agriculture: Situation, constraints and prospects for improvement;
  - New developments in the use of brackish water for agricultural production in the Near East;
- 7) Land issues
  - Status of the use and management of fertilizers in the Near East Region and proposals for improvement
  - Land Tenure Issues in the Near East: Situation and Impacts on Land Management
- 8) Climate change and drought
  - Impacts of Climate Change on Water and Crop Production
  - Capacity building on drought monitoring and early warning systems for drought preparedness and impact mitigation;
- 9) Role of agro-climatic zoning in optimizing agricultural water use under water-scarcity conditions;
- 10) Research progress in the areas of crop water-stress tolerance and salt tolerance

28. The Meeting took note of the Document NERC/08/INF/9 “Summary of the Recommendations of the Regional Commissions and Other Relevant Regional Meetings in the Near East”, which provided a brief summary on the outcome and recommendations of other regional commissions and relevant regional meetings in the Near East. This included the 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI), the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of the Near East Forestry Commission (NEFC) and the 29<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting of the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region. The Meeting called upon the concerned Commissions to take into consideration the various issues raised by the Meeting in their future work.

### **III. OTHER MATTERS**

#### **Information Notes**

29. The Meeting took note of the technical Information Notes prepared for this session of the Regional Conference, which covered priority topics for the Region as identified in previous sessions. The following five Information Notes were included:

- 1) “Climate Change: Implications for Agriculture in the Near East” (NERC/08/INF/5)
- 2) “Pesticide Management in the Near East Region” (NERC/08/INF/6)
- 3) “Reform of National Agricultural Research & Extension Systems” (NERC/08/INF/7)
- 4) “World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2010” (NERC/08/INF/8)
- 5) “Agricultural Marketing in the Near East: Challenges and Policy Issues” (NERC/08/INF/10)

### **IV. CONCLUDING ITEMS**

#### **Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting**

30. The Meeting **adopted** the report of the Senior Officers Meeting after introducing some amendments.

#### **Closure of the Senior Officers Meeting**

31. Upon conclusion of the discussions of the Senior Officers Meeting, the Chairperson, Dr. Saad Nassar, Advisor to His Excellency the Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation in the Arab Republic of Egypt, expressed his thanks to all the delegations for their deliberations and participation in the Meeting. He also thanked FAO and its Regional Office for preparing the documents and their presentation to the Meeting. Dr. Nassar commended the National Organizing Committee and the Conference Secretariat for the good preparation and smooth running of the Meeting. He also thanked the representatives of the International and Regional Organizations and the participating Non-Governmental Organizations.

32. Dr. Nassar declared the Meeting closed at 15:30 hours, on Monday, 3 March 2008.