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Statement by the Chairperson of the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe

Honourable Ministers,

Director-General,

Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I would like to start by thanking the Government of the Republic of Poland. It is my privilege to report about the outcomes of the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) hosted by the Republic of Uzbekistan from 2 to 4 November 2020.

2. In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health concerns, the 32nd Session was for the first time convened virtually on an exceptional basis. This was also the first ever Regional Conference hosted by a Central Asian country, with a record participation of 51 FAO Members, three Observer FAO Member Countries, 15 ministers and 16 vice-ministers, over 300 delegates and observers, in addition to more than 1 500 following the proceedings on webcast and 15 000 impressions on Twitter. The Regional Conference was preceded by the Consultation of the Civil Society Organizations and, for the first time ever, a Consultation of the Private Sector, whose representatives delivered their views during the ERC sessions.

3. In presenting this report, I would like to focus particularly on the importance of preserving the continuity of the sessions of the Regional Conference for Europe, which determine the detailed orientation of FAO's work in our region.

4. At its 32nd Session, the ERC made some very important recommendations, which I reported to the 165th Session of the FAO Council in 2020 and to the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference in 2021, where all ERC recommendations were endorsed. I would like to highlight some of them.

5. In relation to the item on **Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia**, the ERC requested FAO to support, through the Regional Initiatives, governments and non-state actors - in particular the private sector - the development, refinement and implementation of

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

the transformative agenda on sustainable, resilient, inclusive and equitable food systems and healthy diets, taking into account the One Health approach, while addressing specific impacts due to COVID-19. Upon the request by FAO Members, FAO should also work with regional and national coordinating mechanisms and bodies in developing a methodology to assess the sustainability of food systems and to analyze, at the country level, the status of current diets and food systems.

6. The ERC affirmed the importance of adopting a sustainable food systems approach for healthy diets that maximizes contributions to the three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, economic and social) while addressing trade-offs across activities, actors and overall goals as a key commitment in achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering synergies between policy measures.

7. It was also underlined that the COVID-19 pandemic further threatened achieving the SDGs, showing the importance of a resilient and sustainable food system that functions in all circumstances, acknowledging the role of smallholders and family farms as key contributors to ensuring food security during the period of the pandemic.

8. Members were further encouraged to provide an enabling environment for implementing the food systems transformation agenda using the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit to progress further. The promotion of dialogue was highlighted, in particular on the roles of various actors and the fostering of policy coherence for sustainable food systems and healthy diets.

9. In the context of social sustainability and leaving no one behind, the Regional Conference further emphasized to Members, the need to address inequalities in food systems, foster a more people-centred approach, and empower vulnerable and marginalized groups, in order to provide affordable, healthy diets for all.

10. Short supply chains, local markets and agroecological and other innovative approaches were acknowledged as a significant segment in promoting sustainable food systems that are resilient to climate change but also to other shocks (such as those related to the pandemic) while contributing to the reduction of food loss and waste.

11. It was also recognized that the prerequisite for the technology and knowledge transfer to farmers and small enterprises is the innovation, research and well-functioning agricultural extension services.

12. With regards to the item on **Solutions For Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming**, the Regional Conference recognized the need to revitalize rural areas, with a special focus on empowering rural youth and young women.

13. FAO was requested to continue assisting the countries in the region in the sustainable structural transformation of rural areas to expand the multidimensional nature of family farming and to leverage the livelihoods of family farmers, with emphasis on youth and women. Members also recommended that FAO takes into consideration the CFS policy recommendations for promoting youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems and include gender equality as a crosscutting topic under all proposed FAO solutions for youth, employment and development of rural areas. Furthermore, the Conference requested FAO to consider the organization of a youth forum in preparation for the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit.

14. In order to ensure the stimulation of inclusive economic development, the empowerment of smallholder farmers and the promotion of sustainable economic growth and green economy, rural services and rural infrastructure would need to be further strengthened.

15. It was recognized by the Regional Conference that without empowerment and access to decent employment and rural services, young generations will have limited opportunities in rural areas. In this regard, the ERC suggested promoting the empowerment of youth through their participation in national and international governance and decision-making processes to improve their social and economic well-being, addressing the drivers of economic or distress migration, and maximizing the

positive impacts of migration for rural communities and the use of remittances for investments in agriculture and rural development.

16. Furthermore, rural women play a key role in performing critical tasks in family and non-family environments and the lack of development opportunities and safety nets among rural women, especially from risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic were also noted.

17. The Regional Conference encouraged the preparation of national action plans for the United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 (UNDFE) that envisage tangible steps and specific undertakings in support of family farming at country level in the context of the UNDFE.

18. The Regional Conference appreciated the strengthened organizational focus on SDG 1 and SDG 2, and the confirmation of the potential contribution of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative to the attainment of other SDGs as well. The ERC further recognized the importance of strengthening national capacities for improved data integration, analysis and visualization in order to identify interactions and quantify trade-offs among actions designed to address multiple objectives under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with primary ownership of the beneficiary country and the resource partner.

19. The ERC further appreciated the results achieved by FAO in 2018-2019 in the region under the Regional Initiatives (RIs) and other main areas of work, as well as FAO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ERC endorsed the proposed regional priority areas and the revised Regional Initiatives as a programmatic framework approach for FAO's action in 2020-2021, under the item of **Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region**. The Regional Conference also requested FAO to strengthen the work under respective priorities within the FAO mandate, in relation to FAO's contribution to the UN Food Systems Summit, the integration of policy changes related to nutrition and healthy diets and transforming food systems based on the three dimensions of sustainable development, the integration of One Health approach, the promotion of equality and digital inclusion - stressing social protection and school food and nutrition programmes, and many other issues as outlined in the ERC Report. The importance of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 has been recognized by the Regional Conference in providing direction for FAO's technical work and welcomed the efforts to anchor the revised Strategic Framework to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including to SDG 2 and SDG 1 as cornerstones for all FAO activities.

20. The **Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014-2019 in Europe and Central Asia Region** was also appreciated by the Regional Conference, welcoming FAO management's acceptance of the recommendations. To name a few: improving the existing accountability framework at regional and thematic level; implementing a consistent and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system at all levels; strengthening the capacities of regional and subregional offices to provide backstopping support to FAO country offices in project formulation and resource prospecting, etc. Finally, a progress report on the implementation of the recommendations at the next ERC has been requested by the Members and to become a regular feature in future Regional Conferences under a similar agenda item.

21. The **Decentralized Offices' Network** item was considered through written correspondence procedure, whereby based on the inputs received from the Members, FAO was requested to further pursue the adjustment of its Decentralized Offices business models in order to further align and create synergies with the single action plan under the responsibility of the Resident Coordinator.

22. In line with the recommendations of the evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework, the ERC further requested FAO to shift towards a full programmatic approach at the decentralized level, and to continue its efforts to strengthen its technical capacities and policy integration at regional and subregional levels, in particular through further cooperation with the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs) at regional and country level.

23. In closing, I would like to thank the Secretariat for its valuable support and for the work it has done to implement the ERC recommendations into the work of the Organization in the region.

24. I wish you all successful and productive work at this first time hybrid 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe.