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Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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Organisation des Nations
Unies pour l'alimentation
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Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة
الأغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

Thirty-first Session

Voronezh, Russian Federation, 16-18 May

Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

Chairperson,

Honourable Ministers,

Director-General

Distinguished Delegates,

1. It is a privilege for me to participate in this 31st Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe, and an opportunity to address this meeting for the first time in my role as Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council. Before sharing some thoughts on the issues that both the Council and this Regional Conference will focus on, please allow me to convey my appreciation to the Chairperson of this Conference, His Excellency Alexander Tkachev, Minister for Agriculture of the Russian Federation. I also wish to extend my appreciation to the Government of the Russian Federation for hosting us in the beautiful city of Voronezh.

2. The Regional Conferences are now an integral and important component of FAO's governance structure as they provide the imperative regional perspectives into the programme of work of the Organization. Indeed, one of the important tasks of this 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Europe will be priority setting at the regional level, focussing on the "Organizational Outcomes", which define the results of FAO's work. The priorities expressed by this session will be taken into consideration in the preparation of the Organization's Programme of Work and Budget for the next biennium.

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3. I expect that after fruitful deliberations over the course of this week, Members of the Europe Region will provide clear and specific recommendations to the FAO Conference and Council in the final report of this session. I am sure that in doing so, Members will also take into account the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, which are core to the work of the Organization. SDGs 1 and 2 are particularly central to achieving the overall agenda for sustainable development. FAO, with its expertise and technical knowledge, is undoubtedly well positioned to support countries in this region to achieve these goals.

4. Indeed, 14 of the 17 SDGs are related to FAO's work, and close alignment between SDGs and the FAO Strategic Objectives confirm the considerable potential for FAO to contribute substantially to the implementation of the new global development framework. It is clear, however, that without greater progress in reducing and eliminating hunger and malnutrition by 2030, the full range of SDGs will not be achieved.

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. As you may be aware, the data contained in the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) Report in 2017 was not positive: hunger is on the rise. SOFI estimates that 815 million people suffered from hunger in 2016. This represents an increase of 38 million people compared to 2015, when the number was 777 million. This data puts the achievement of SDG 2 under threat.

6. This leads me to draw your attention to another aspect: almost 60 percent of the people suffering from hunger in the world live in areas affected by conflicts and by the impact of climate change. They are predominantly rural people. In 2017, the number of people who migrated across international borders reached 258 million. A large share of migration is driven by socio-economic reasons like food insecurity, environmental degradation, poverty, lack of employment and limited social protection. At its 158th Session in December 2017, the FAO Council expressed its appreciation that the Organization will Co-Chair the Global Migration Group (GMG) in 2018, together with the International Organization for Migration. This year is going to be critical for the future of migration as UN Member States will adopt a Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration and a Global Compact for Refugees. During this Session, you will have the opportunity to provide guidance, from the regional perspective, on GMG priorities for Europe.

7. It should also be highlighted that the 158th Session of the FAO Council acknowledged that the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture, as deliberated at the COP23, sets the agriculture and food security agenda for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process and encouraged FAO's efforts in that regard. This year, COP24 will take place in Poland, Katowice, where the Parties of the Convention will adopt a package of decisions ensuring the full implementation of the Paris Agreement. These days you will have the opportunity to provide guidance on the actions towards achieving the Agreement and SDG 13.

8. Finally, the 158th Session of the FAO Council stressed its continuous support to the sustainable agriculture production, including agroecology. It should be noted that at the beginning of April, an International Symposium on Agroecology took place at FAO Headquarters. The Symposium synthesized and built on the outcomes of the regional meetings, and provided an opportunity to share and discuss policies that can help scale-up and scale-out agroecology in order to achieve the SDGs.

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. To conclude, I should like to encourage this meeting to bear in mind that as a Governing Body of the Organization, this 31 Session of the Regional Conference for Europe has a unique and crucial role to play in defining FAO policies. I trust that the Report you will submit to the 159th Session of the Council next month with regard to programme and budgetary matters, and to the 41st Session of the FAO Conference in June 2019 with regard to policy and regulatory matters, will clearly spell out the regional views you would like the Organization to act on in the coming biennium.

10. Chairperson, I would like to wish you and the delegates to this Regional Conference fruitful deliberations.

11. Thank you for your attention.