



36th Session of the Regional Conference of the Asia and the Pacific

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Excellencies

Honorable Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalaam Alaikum.

It gives me immense pleasure and honor to join 36th Session of the Regional Conference of the Asia and the Pacific in this beautiful city of Dhaka, Bangladesh. First of all, please allow to commend FAO and Government of Bangladesh for the excellent arrangement of the conference and the kind hospitality rendered to me and my delegation.

Honorable Chair,

Maldives being a coral atoll nation, with less than 1% dry land, and 80% of which lies below 1 meter from the sea-level, and with virtually no known valuable natural endowments, except our marine resources and the natural beauty of our islands, we are highly vulnerable to climate change. Like many other small island developing countries, it is extremely challenging to achieve the UN SDG goals as planned.

Fisheries is our country's bloodline. However, unsustainable harvesting technologies, like commercial purse seining in the Indian Ocean is decimating the valuable tuna stocks. With climate change, the ocean is getting warmer and warmer, slowly cooking the corals. With consequential coral bleaching, there is a risk of huge biodiversity loss! Bait fishing is a prerequisite to our sustainable, one-by-one tuna pole and line fishery. Bait fish species are vanishing from our reefs at an alarming speed, which has consequences of the tuna industry, which is the main source of our protein, livelihood and foreign exchange earner.

Looking at agriculture, arable land is very scarce in the Maldives. With continued use of agrochemicals, agricultural lands are degrading, our irrigation water quality is becoming poorer.

Climate change not only impact our fishing, aquaculture and agriculture but have severe impact on our tourism sector as well. Powerful wind storms, excessive down-pour, high temperature and emergence of diseases are continued threats during the monsoons and beyond.

Our high dependency on imported food is an inequality that we have inherited. However, we strive to change this status quo. It is critical that we get the necessary support to invest into sustainable, regenerative food production, distribution, and consumption models. We must develop sustainable small scale and commercial agriculture, fisheries and mariculture.

Honorable Chair,

Investments into renewable energy for agri-food production, fish processing, food distribution and reduce the import and cost of food are priorities for my country.

Furthermore, climate proofing of food systems by investing into vertical greenhouse farming, establishing onboard cooling facilities for fishing vessels, improving storage and introducing insurance programs for fishers and farmers and reducing food waste by improving food habits that are important and integral to food security of our country. Each of these areas need quality education, profitable businesses, easy access to finance and ICT.

Honorable Chair,

Regional collaborations are equally important for equitable food, livelihood and wellbeing of the region. We cannot deny that natural disasters, conflicts and wars are emerging and therefore, regional stability and growth is more than ever required. It is our responsibility to build an equitable and safe region for our people.

It is important that we work together for food safety and address production of counterfeit food products including package food, contaminated raw food produce, feed, medication and pest/disease control products.

Consumption of food with the contamination have severe health impacts ranging from malnutrition, obesity and spread of non-communicable diseases.

It is extremely important that countries monitor its food export and add measures to ensure the safety by regulating standards and trade. We call upon regional efforts to safeguard the health and safety of the people by investing in improving the regulation of food production and marketing systems.

I will conclude with by calling on leaders to make collective efforts to build a sustainable regenerative food system in the region, leading to a better future for us all.

Thank you