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Organización de las
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منظمة
الأغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

Thirty-fourth Session

1–5 February 2021

STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Good morning, good evening, good afternoon from all over the world.

Dear Ministers,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to join you at the opening of Thirty fourth Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), the first virtual one in history.
2. The FAO that welcomes you today is a renewed, energized, and digital Organization.
3. Throughout the last 18 months, we have continued **building a dynamic FAO for a better world, while remaining committed to its original aspirations, mandate and mission.**
4. A new modular and flexible structure ensures efficiency, effectiveness and cross-sectoral collaboration.
5. Breaking silos and strengthening the enabling environment makes us better positioned to respond rapidly to emerging needs and priorities.
6. **A new Strategic Framework that builds on the momentum and transformations already taking place in the Organization,** and that recognizes the challenges facing humanity.
7. The **new Strategic Framework is anchored in the 2030 Agenda and guided by SDG 1 No Poverty, SDG 2 No Hunger, and SDG 10 Reducing Inequalities.**
8. Of course, the new Strategic Framework will be discussed in the upcoming meetings, PC/FC, Council Meeting and the Biennial Ministerial Conference. We are preparing for that.
9. **It puts at its center the strategic narrative of Leaving No One Behind through sustainable, inclusive and resilient agri-food systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life – the Four Betters.**
10. The fisheries and aquaculture sector has a crucial contribution to make within the Four Betters.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

11. **Better Production: What does Better Production mean for Fisheries?** Making full use of the opportunities available for the sustainable intensification of aquaculture, and innovative and more effective fisheries management, as part of the necessary transformation of agri-food systems.
 12. **Better Nutrition:** recognizing the benefits of fish in diets, especially for pregnant women, children and all forms of malnutrition, and promoting fish in food and nutrition strategies across the world.
 13. **Better Environment:** ensuring the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries and Aquaculture, less environment footprints for high quality of nutrients, and ensuring the sustainable use of aquatic biodiversity.
 14. **Better Life:** acknowledging that 10 percent of the world's population relies on the fisheries and aquaculture sector for their livelihoods, mostly small producers that need our support. And fisheries and aquaculture provide a soothing positive impact on our souls - I believe that our goal is to improve life as a whole, beyond livelihoods!
 15. The **centrality of agri-food systems transformation** in the new Strategic Framework will also enable FAO to provide substantive approach and support to Members in their implementation of the outcomes of **2021 UN Food Systems Summit**.
 16. In that context, I look forward to listening to your views on how the production, processing, trade, and consumption of aquatic foods (which is much more than the flesh of fish) can be transformed. I am talking about aquatic foods, which is aquatic industry, and it is not only about the fish industry.
 17. Because we know that land alone will not feed us with abundant quantity and food diversity – On this blue planet, only 30 percent is not water, ocean, rivers or lakes; So, that is our future, that is our biggest potential as one earth, one planet. We need Blue Transformation to secure Blue Food supply and sustainability.
 18. The positive impact of the sustainable, inclusive, and science-based transformation of fisheries and aquaculture food systems will be tremendous.
- Distinguished Delegates,
19. We need to bring urgency to our actions because the challenges we face cannot be underestimated.
 20. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions to agri-food systems and the global economic downturn is expected to make this situation worse than ever before.
 21. The fisheries sector has been subject to the impacts of the pandemic through changing consumer demands, market access, and logistical problems related to transportation and border restrictions.
 22. It is estimated that 1 in 4 jobs in the food sector is at risk.
 23. The pandemic may add up to more than 132 million people to the ranks of the undernourished in 2020. Millions of people still go hungry; that has really reversed the progress of SDGs and what we have achieved during the past decade. At the same time, too much of the food we produce is lost and wasted.
 24. These global and critical issues are closely linked with the work of your Committee (COFI).
 25. Because **fisheries and in particular aquaculture are an essential part of the solution**.

26. The potential of a modern aquaculture to grow and feed the world is extraordinary.
27. Modernizing traditional fisher culture with innovative approaches and digital technologies, and also modern management and business model of marketing, they will help us change completely the whole sector.
28. Combining the fisheries with tourism and educational activities is a way of keeping the cultural heritage alive and creating new values and new job opportunities. That really contributes to SDGs and the social-economic environment sustainable development.
29. Fisheries and aquaculture are critical for the world economy built back better.
30. And here I am not only talking as a Director-General, as a scientist or as a manager but more importantly, as a proud son of rice growers.
31. I grew up in the southern parts of the Hunan province in China, where I enjoyed aquatic foods. Fish, of course, as well as aquatic vegetables and other aquatic products, which are produced in paddy rice fields in lakes, rivers and ponds. So, it is really the ecosystem, which has the potential that you can get a lot of food. Of course, you need a sustainable way to produce, to harvest and to maintain this.
32. I am convinced that Fishes helped us as a child – it is an essential food that can be part of any of the three meals of the day together with staple food of rice. Rice only offers carbohydrates and not so many other nutrients. Fish is a real good complement for the development of human being at early stages.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

33. FAO is fully engaged in providing technical advice and concrete support to its Members.
34. We are operating a comprehensive **COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme** to help countries build back better and stronger.
35. We also continue to implement our innovative **Hand-in-Hand Initiative**, which is evidence-based, country-led and country-owned, and aims to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2).
36. In so doing, it contributes to the attainment of all other SDGs.
37. And we are addressing zoonotic diseases through the **One Health** approach with WHO and OIE, in collaboration with other partners.
38. **The pandemic gave impetus to innovate.**
39. FAO is committed to innovation-powered solutions through digital technologies, which can combine big data and artificial intelligence for decision-making. This includes tools such as:
- The **Hand in Hand Geospatial Platform**, which is a geographic information system (GIS) data platform that supports all stakeholders with rich, shareable data.
 - The **Data Lab for statistical innovation** that is implementing the combined use of non-conventional data sources, big data, data science, and text mining methods for decision-making and impact assessment.
 - **Earth Map** - an innovative, free and open-source Big Data tool, developed by FAO and launched last September together with Google. It provides efficient, rapid, inexpensive, and analytically cogent insights, drawn from satellites, as well as FAO's considerable wealth of data, with a few clicks on a computer.

- And we are working towards the establishment of an **International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture**. This initiative will provide an inclusive multi-stakeholder forum for identifying and discussing the potential benefits and risks of digitalizing the food and agricultural sectors.

40. FAO's experts in fisheries and aquaculture contribute to these tools in many ways, including by combining our unparalleled sectoral datasets to provide targeted and holistic solutions at scale, using new observational capabilities to improve management and efficiency of blue production systems, as well as promoting value chain digitization and traceability from pond to plate.

41. I invite you to explore how these tools can be of specific use for your work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

42. 2020 was the 25th anniversary of the **Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries**, which the FAO Conference adopted in 1995.

43. The Code has been guiding the principles of responsible and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture at national, regional and global levels for the last quarter of a century.

44. This afternoon, a High-level Special Event will celebrate the anniversary of the Code by discussing its great past and planning its challenging future.

45. The Committee will be invited to endorse the **COFI Declaration for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture**, to recognize the successes achieved since the Code was adopted, to focus our attention on the road ahead, and to reinvigorate the Code by further commitment.

Distinguished Delegates,

46. The FAO Committee on Fisheries is the only global inter-governmental forum, where major international fisheries and aquaculture problems and issues are addressed.

47. During the course of this week, the Committee will address numerous essential matters for global fisheries policy, including the contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

48. I will follow your deliberations with great interest.

49. The Committee will also highlight the central place that fish and oceans, lakes and rivers occupy in our life, by exploring the **critical connection between fish, communities and culture**.

50. With that in mind, before we were preparing for this meeting, I asked my colleague, the Director of the Fisheries Division. We launched the **"My fish food experience" initiative**, inviting FAO employees to share, through short videos, how they experience aquatic foods in their lives.

51. Now, I also encourage all the delegates to share your experience with aquatic foods. I really believe that if we want to change business and play a more decisive role in agri-food systems, you have to start at an entry point, by promoting consumption. Rather than as usual, starting from production. The driving force is consumption. Driving force comes from consumers. Consumers are really the game changers.

52. We were pleased to receive contributions from colleagues all around the world, at their local fish markets, their favourite restaurants, their kitchens, or even fishing in the sea, rivers, and lakes.

53. Some of the videos will be shown between Committee sessions, and a short video will be played immediately after my speech.

54. They will also be featured on a dedicated section of the Committee's website, together with **fish recipes** that Permanent Representatives here in Rome, as well as FAO employees around the world, have shared as part of the same initiative.

55. A collection of recipes selected to reflect the variety of regional flavours will be used to produce a digital fish cookbook highlighting the role fish foods play in our lives and its link to local cultures and traditions.

56. We hope the "My fish food experience" will inspire people and remind them of the vital role fish plays as a source of healthy food and as part of life everywhere on our planet. I say it again, promoting fisheries starts at consumption side rather than at production side. Because if you appreciate the fish dishes, then you will start to appreciate the fish producers and all the fish research and management. If there is no promotion, there is no real driving force for change.

57. Your deliberations are crucial not only to the work of FAO but also to our consumers on this planet, and we look forward to the fruitful outcomes of your discussions. I hope everywhere and any place you have healthy diets with fish.

58. In Chinese [Niánnián Yoúyú, Shìshì Yoúyú! Yoúyú Jiùyóu Xìngfú dē Shēnghuó !] Every year, every place you have fish, it means you have a happy life.

Thank you.