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Food and Agriculture
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Продовольственная и
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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-fifth Session

21-22 September 2020¹

Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Consultation

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¹ Rescheduled from 2-4 March, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

I. Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Consultation

1. Civil Society Organizations working with FAO met at Casablanca in February 2020, to prepare for this conference, celebrating four biennial cycles of progressive cooperation and reaffirming that much potential remains to develop that relationship and tap the indispensable resource of civil society partnership. We recalled the standing recommendation for a small-scale farmer mechanism to inform policy formulation with FAO and governments in our region.
2. In the current complex crisis with COVID-19, we see how shorter chains and local food systems are vital to sustenance, recovery and food sovereignty. Since 2016 also, serial CSO consultations have advised FAO on needs and corresponding policy priorities in guiding support for small-scale family farming and water-sector investment with civic end-user input or engagement to remedy structural causes of problems, while linking to the SDG commitments and the treaty-bound obligations of states.
3. We share FAO's commitment to this coherence and success at both policy and project levels, with the well-being of citizens and the continuous improvement of living conditions, including food sovereignty and realizing the human right to adequate food and nutrition, as the highest priorities.
4. Civil society's partnership with FAO has developed remarkably well since NERC33, while relating to FAO as more than just a technical agency, but whose added value lies in its operation grounded in the UN Charter with its three pillars. However, civil society is here not only to convene, but to work within this rubric in country operations. That is why we have collaborated with FAO's regional office to develop a database of CSO partners as a resource to manage and identify local competences to bring added value and legitimating local experiences, priorities and relevance to programs and projects. We expect this to be a useful tool in realizing FAO-civil society complementarity.
5. Civil society's efforts and proposals over years have sought to give meaning also to the "decentralization process" that has yet to reach its potential at "developing strategic partnerships with other stakeholders to meet the needs of Member States." And it is when speaking to states—including through FAO—that we can have the dialogue needed to address the structural issues impeding progress on the priorities on this Conference's agenda.
6. Therefore, deeper thinking and greater effort are needed to remedy the crises of food and nutrition that have resulted from farmer debt, irrational urbanization, environmental destruction, declining biodiversity, privatization of common resources and services, and the urban and rural joblessness in non-productive economies enabled and perpetuated by various interests. Above all, in our region, the perennial drivers of food insecurity are armed conflicts and protracted crises, including cyclical economic calamities.
7. We also have a role to shoulder with FAO at the coming UN Food Systems Summit. This process is a golden opportunity to remedy the systemic fault lines and global food-chain problems laid bare during the climate crisis and current pandemic. We

- appeal to states to ensure that FAO's combined technical expertise and normative agency, along with civil society, are central to the Summit's global conversation.
8. Going forward, we are encouraged by possibilities offered by the UN Decade for Family Farming and by all of our states' having adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants [and Other People Working in Rural Areas] and look forward also to practical collaboration this biennium across FAO's seven well-chosen themes for recovery from the present complex crisis.