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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Thirty-sixth Session

Dhaka, Bangladesh, 8-11 March 2022

**Statement by the Chairperson of the 35th Session of the Regional
Conference for Asia and the Pacific**

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Excellencies,
Director-General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Greetings and welcome to the 36th Session of the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific. Thank you very much to the People's Republic of Bangladesh for graciously hosting this meeting.
2. I take this opportunity to convey the greetings and wishes of His Majesty the King, Hon'ble Prime Minister, Government and the people of Bhutan to all the distinguished delegates of this Regional Conference.
3. I am honoured and pleased to be with you all today and to reach our distinguished delegates in our wide and diverse region through the technology of videoconferencing as well as in person. Despite geography, wide time zone differences and a continuing global pandemic, we have come together again.
4. At the 35th Session of this Regional Conference, we had our first virtual conference, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts and negative consequences of the pandemic, in human cost and the economic repercussions of lockdowns, travel restrictions and disruptions of food supply chains are still with us, and we will be coping with them for a long time to come.
5. We noted in 2020, that countries of the region, acted promptly and responsibly, to cushion the impact on vulnerable populations, with social protection measures and safety net schemes.
6. The COVID-19 pandemic did take a central place in our discussions, but in addition to the discussion of its impact, APRC 35 cast the net wider.
7. Digitalization and innovation were key topics in the Regional Conference hosted by Bhutan, with particular focus on the use of innovative technologies, evidence-based analyses and partnerships to develop multi-sectoral solutions for pressing issues. Also discussed were climate change, trans-boundary pests and diseases, and ecosystem restoration to support the adoption of food systems thinking across the Asia and Pacific region. Again, we have before us, a paper and a special event to further consider the actual and potential benefits of digitalization and innovation.
8. The previous Regional Conference recommended that resources be allocated to address water scarcity, including the development of a regional high-level collaborative platform on water scarcity to facilitate sharing of country experiences. There are many best practices and lessons learned in water accounting, water allocation, digital innovation and water governance. This year, we have a follow up document on this topic for our consideration.
9. The previous Regional Conference noted the importance of improved resilience and adaptation to climate change in coastal fisheries; to enable sustained benefits from coastal ecosystems and recovery from natural disasters; and recognized that Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing threatens fishery resources in the region. These discussions anticipated the celebrations of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture in 2022.
10. Other highlights of APRC 35 were that FAO undertook to support Member Nations, in collaboration and partnership with the private sector, regional and international organizations, to build on FAO's normative and standard setting work with such notable initiatives such as Hand-in-Hand.
11. In 2021, the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference, adopted the Strategic Framework 2022-31. At this Regional Conference, we will consider how to move forward in our work with FAO. The tenor of the global mood is sombre, given the last two years of pandemic, and we must now look forward to recovery.
12. There is hope.

13. In the spirit of that hope, we are meeting to discuss how the work of FAO in Asia and the Pacific region can assist us, at the local, country and regional levels to recover. Not only recover but also to Build Forward Better.
14. Through sound policies and programs that place greater focus on resilient agrifood systems, nutrition-sensitive food diversification and improved fisheries' sustainability, given its important role in food security, particularly in the Pacific, we can accelerate recovery and make advances. Through improved storage and logistics infrastructure, leveraging of accessible digital innovations and green and climate-resilient technologies, reduced food loss and waste and improved food safety norms, we can move beyond where we were pre-COVID-19.
15. We will hear and discuss in the next two days how FAO's *four betters* can contribute to fulfilling this hope.
16. This aim will be achieved only if we continue to work together in harmony and cohesion, beyond the few hours of this meeting.
17. In the Senior Officers segment of this Conference, we have discussed the state of food and agriculture in the region, in the light of COVID-19, climate change, One Health, biodiversity, and digitalization. We exchanged views on how FAO's priorities can lead to the transformation of agrifood systems to ensure food security and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. As in 2020, innovation and digitalization, of which this region is a global leader, will be covered in several sessions.
18. APRC 36 is sure to be a very dynamic forum for an exchange of our issues and ways forward.
19. I would like to pass on the sincere congratulations of the Royal Government of Bhutan to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, for hosting the 36th Conference.
20. Thank you for your kind attention and I convey my full confidence that this Regional Conference will meet its objectives and provide sound policy guidance to FAO.
21. Tashi Delek!