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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

Thirty-fourth Session

Rome, Italy, 14-17 May 2024

Statement by the Chairperson of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe

Your Excellency Mr Chairperson.

FAO Director-General,

Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I would like to start by thanking the Government of the Republic of Moldova for hosting the 34th Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC). It is my privilege as Vice Chairperson of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe, hosted by the Republic of Poland from 10 to 13 May 2022, to report to you on its outcomes as a means of facilitating the link between ERC sessions.

2. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health concerns, the ERC agreed to conduct the 2022 session in a hybrid modality. The Regional Conference was preceded by the Consultation of the Civil Society Organizations and a Consultation of the Private Sector, whose representatives delivered their views during the ERC sessions.

3. At its 33rd Session, the ERC made very important recommendations, which the Chairperson reported to the 170th Session of the FAO Council in 2022, and myself to the 43rd Session of the FAO Conference in 2023, where all ERC recommendations were endorsed. I would like to highlight some of them.

4. Two years ago, the 33rd Session of the ERC emerged with a clear road map: a set of recommendations designed to build resilient agrifood systems in Europe and Central Asia. At the

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

conference, Members endorsed the idea that addressing the immediate crisis was of paramount importance. They urged for more regional cooperation to ensure that food continues to reach the most vulnerable. Collaborative efforts were called on to prevent that the situation deteriorated into a regional food security crisis.

5. The war in Ukraine was of concern back then, and still it continues to cast a long shadow. While the immediate food security crisis may have somewhat eased, the long-term consequences are still unfolding. In this context, FAO's role as a neutral platform in fostering international cooperation remains crucial. As recommended by the Regional Conference, we must continue to work together to:

- a. Facilitate dialogue and collaboration between countries to ensure a smooth flow of food and agricultural products. This can involve measures like reducing trade barriers and coordinating stockpiling strategies.
- b. Support countries heavily reliant on food imports in their efforts to diversify their food sources and build long-term resilience.
- c. Provide technical assistance to countries facing disruptions in their agricultural production due to the war.
- d. Support the development of social safety nets to protect vulnerable populations from food insecurity.

6. Speaking about the future, the 33rd Session of ERC looked beyond the immediate needs. It envisioned the transformation of agrifood systems in our region. Two years ago, it advocated for innovation, technology, and data-driven approaches. Precision agriculture has begun to take root, empowering farmers to optimize resources and boost productivity. Yet, the ERC emphasized that innovation should not come at the expense of inclusivity. In this sense, efforts are underway to ensure that these advancements can be applied for the benefit of small-scale farmers, particularly women, who play a critical role in the region's food production, yet whose access to capital, technology and finance is hampered.

7. In 2022, the Regional Conference also underscored the importance of sustainable and nutrition-sensitive food value chains. It noted that stakeholders in the region need to put more emphasis on collaboration across the entire chain – from producers to retailers and consumers.

8. The ERC also underlined the need for accountability. It acknowledged that strides are being made towards improved reporting and transparency mechanisms within FAO. This allows Members to better measure progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and identify areas for improvement.

9. Under the item on regional results, priorities, the *four betters* and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Regional Conference acknowledged the work of FAO in the region during 2020–2021, including the achievements under the Regional Initiatives and other main areas of work, as well as appreciated FAO's approach to adapting to the COVID19 pandemic.

10. The ERC endorsed the revised regional priority areas, which guided FAO's actions in 2022-23 and beyond, as well as the three revised Regional Initiatives maintaining emphasis on poverty reduction.

11. The Regional Conference requested FAO to strengthen the work under the respective priorities within its mandate, in relation to science and innovation, digital solutions, national pathways following the United Nations Food Systems Summit, antimicrobial resistance, mainstreaming biodiversity, nature-based solutions, youth and gender, and other issues outlined in the ERC Report.

12. The importance of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 was recognized by the Regional Conference in providing direction for FAO's work and contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region.

13. The Regional Conference recommended that the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy should rely on a human-centred, ethical and responsible vision of science, data use, innovation and

technology. Clear linkages with FAO's policies on data protection and intellectual property rights, as well as private sector engagement, should be established, providing safeguards. Members called for the strategy to be participatory and demand-driven, leading to and building on stakeholder-driven innovations that are adaptable and responsive to local contexts and needs.

14. With respect to the FAO Strategy on Climate Change 2022-2031, the Regional Conference recommended FAO to ensure that the strategy is tackling the root causes of climate change. It is aimed to address its impacts on the agrifood system in ways that acknowledge the vulnerability of countries and communities in the region. FAO should also ensure that the specific needs of Members and agrifood system actors from Europe and Central Asia are considered in the strategy and during implementation.

15. The *Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2020-2021 in Europe and Central Asia Region* was also appreciated by the Regional Conference, which requested FAO to strengthen its monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes to deliver sustainable and lasting impact on the ground.

16. The Conference concluded that the way forward is full of challenges. But the spirit of collaboration and innovation fostered by the 33rd Session of ERC continues to propel us forward. The echoes of that pivotal conference two years ago serve as a constant reminder of the work that remains, but also of the progress we have made together. Let us continue this path, ensuring a secure and sustainable food future for all.

17. In closing, I would like to thank the Regional Conference Secretariat for its valuable support and the Regional Office for the work they have done to implement the ERC recommendations into the work of the Organization in the region.

18. I wish you all successful and productive work at this 34th Session of the Regional Conference for Europe.