Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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FAO Director General: Where there is hunger, there can be no lasting peace.

Speaking at the Ministerial meeting of the Thirty Third Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

12 May 2016, Cairo / Rome:

His Excellency Mr. Akram Chehayeb, Minister of Agriculture of Lebanon, / and Chairperson of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East;

Mr. Wilfred Ngirwa, Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council;

Her Excellency Ambassador Amira Gornass, Chairperson of the World Food Committee;

Honorable Ministers;

Excellencies;

Distinguished Delegates; Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to address you at this Regional Conference for the Near East.

The Conference offers a great opportunity to reflect at the regional level on how to move forward to overcome the many challenges ahead.

As we all know, the United Nations Member Countries have just begun to pursue the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs.

Food and agriculture lie at the very heart of the 2030 Agenda, especially regarding the SDGs number 1 and 2 / of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in just 15 years-time. Nearly 80 percent of the world's extremely poor and hungry people live in rural areas.

In the Near East and North Africa region, 15 out of the 19 countries monitored by FAO have achieved the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the proportion of undernourished people and the State of Kuwait and the Sultanate of Oman also achieved the more ambitious World Food Summit target of halving the total number of hungry people.
But despite these positive figures, the countries under conflict in the region had a serious setback in its fight against hunger.

For the region as a whole there has been a 30 percent increase in the prevalence of undernourishment. The total number of hungry people has doubled, and now stands at nearly 33 million.

The vast majority of these people affected by food insecurity live in Iraq, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, as well as in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In these countries and areas under protracted crises. conflict has been the main driver of hunger and malnutrition.

In Syria, 6.5 million people have been internally displaced, while more than 4.8 million have fled to the neighboring countries and elsewhere as refugees. Half of the Syrian population that remains in the country is in need of food assistance. FAO has been working with its partners to strengthen the food security and resilience of the most affected people. Not only to mitigate impacts, but also to set the foundations for post-crisis recovery.

The NENA region is also facing an unprecedented escalation in water scarcity. The average availability of fresh water per capita stands at just 10 percent of the world average.

Water scarcity is rising as urban populations grow and divert it from agriculture, with negative consequences for food security and the rural economy. In addition, climate change compounds the already dire natural resource situation in the region.
It exacerbates existing vulnerabilities to natural hazards such as drought.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

FAO has been working to implement the set of recommendations approved in the last Regional Conference in 2014.

The three Regional Initiatives have started to show positive results. The first Initiative, "building resilience for Food Security", gives priority to supporting resilience interventions in countries affected by protracted crises.

On nutrition, FAO has helped countries to set up national multi-stakeholder committees to follow up on the Second International Conference on Nutrition.

The Organization has also facilitated a regional dialogue among member countries, civil society, the League of Arab States and development partners.

Regarding the Second Regional Initiative on Small-Scale Agriculture. FAO has promoted interventions that address some key areas, such as governance and institutions, capacities of producer organizations, social protection and youth employment.

The Initiative has also provided assistance to projects aimed at improving smallholders' productivity through improved extension systems and easier access to markets.

The third Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity has supported the implementation of the "Regional Collaborative Strategy on Sustainable Agricultural Water Management and Food Security".

In order to assist countries in tracking and monitoring water efficiency and productivity, the Initiative has

initiated actions to develop systems for monitoring and reporting on water use, including remote sensing techniques.

Despite the significant challenge that resource mobilization efforts face in the region due to political instability and insecurity, the resources mobilized for NENA amounted to 83 million US dollars in 2014, and only 61 million US dollars in 2015.

We need more support from the rich countries in the region to better assist themselves and their neighbors

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another important agenda item for this conference is the review of the Decentralized Offices Network.

FAO is seeking to update the coverage of its decentralized offices, in order to have more efficiency and better conditions to assist Member Countries.

The inputs from the Regional Conferences will be added to the document presented at the last Council Session in December.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the importance of achieving sustainable development for a safer and more peaceful world.

As recognized by the 2030 Agenda, there is no sustainable development without peace, and there is no lasting peace without sustainable development.

Providing food security is essential for achieving both: sustainable development and peace.

As many of you know, I have recently addressed the UN Security Council to highlight the contributions of food security and agriculture to prevent conflicts, and build stable and peaceful societies.

Yesterday, here at FAO Headquarters, we launched the FAO-Nobel Prize Laureates Alliance for Food Security and Peace to further explore this strong relationship between conflict and hunger.

Later today, we will have a side event to discuss how food security and agriculture could better contribute to promoting and reinforcing peace in the region. I would like to reiterate the invitation to all of you to participate especially the ministers present in this Conference

FAO's conviction is that where there is conflict, there is hunger.

And where there is hunger, there can be no lasting peace.

Thank you for your attention.

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