

Report of the

EIGHTEENTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Istanbul, Turkey, 17-21 March 1986



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

*FAO Member Nations in the Near East Region
(as of 21 March 1986)*

Afghanistan	Lebanon	Somalia
Algeria	Libya	Sudan
Bahrain	Mauritania	Syria
Cyprus	Morocco	Tunisia
Djibouti	Oman	Turkey
Egypt	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Qatar	Yemen Arab Republic
Iraq	Saudi Arabia,	Yemen, People's
Jordan	Kingdom of	Democratic Republic of
Kuwait		

Date and place of FAO Regional Conferences for the Near East

First	— Cairo, Egypt, 2 - 14 February 1948
Second	— Damascus, Syria, 28 August - 6 September 1951
Third	— Cairo, Egypt, 1 - 9 September 1953
Fourth	— Damascus, Syria, 10 - 20 December 1958
Fifth	— Teheran, Iran, 21 September - 1 October 1960
Sixth	— Tel Amara, Lebanon, 30 July - 8 August 1962
Seventh	— Cairo, Egypt, 19 - 31 October 1964
Eighth	— Khartoum, Sudan, 24 January - 2 February 1967
Ninth	— Baghdad, Iraq, 21 September - 1 October 1968
Tenth	— Islamabad, Pakistan, 12 - 22 September 1970
Eleventh	— Kuwait, Kuwait, 9 - 19 September 1972
Twelfth	— Amman, Jordan, 31 August - 9 September 1974
Thirteenth	— Tunis, Tunisia, 4 - 11 October 1976
Fourteenth	— Damascus, Syria, 9 - 16 September 1978
Fifteenth	— Rome, Italy, 21 - 25 April 1981
Sixteenth	— Nicosia, Cyprus, 25 - 29 October 1982
Seventeenth	— Aden, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, 11 - 15 March 1984
Eighteenth	— Istanbul, Turkey, 17 - 21 March 1986

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Istanbul, Turkey, 17 - 21 March 1986

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, 1986

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EIGHTEENTH REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Istanbul, Turkey, 17 - 21 March 1986

SUMMARY OF MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

A. FOR THE ATTENTION OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

1. FAO Programme in the Region

The Conference:

1.1 Urged member countries to take advantage of the recently approved "International Code of Conduct for Use and Distribution of Pesticides" and enact regulations for pesticide registration and control, and to organize training programmes on the safe handling and application of pesticides (para 44);

1.2 Urged member countries to cooperate fully with FAO in implementing rinderpest campaigns (para 45);

1.3 Urged member countries to apply strict veterinary control measures on animal trade and to coordinate inter-country actions to arrest the spread of diseases and epizootics across national borders (para 46);

1.4 Urged member countries interested in small ruminant production to participate, through the appropriate national R and D institutions, in the Near East Regional Cooperative Research and Development Network on Small Ruminants which was established in response to a recommendation adopted by the First Session of the Near East Regional Commission on Agriculture (Cairo, 1985) (para 47);

1.5 Urged member countries to make full use of the training and development support activities of the Regional Poultry Training and Development Centre established in Amman, Jordan by FAO, and financed by the Government of Italy (para 48);

1.6 Urged member countries to ensure the full participation of their national institutions in the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA) (para 49);

1.7 Urged member countries to respond positively to the Director-General's invitation to participate in the Regional Network of National Institutes for Agro-Industries Development in the Near East Region and to attend the Technical Consultation planned in 1986 to discuss the relevant document (para 52);

1.8 Urged member countries to ratify the agreement of the Regional Centre on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in the Near East so that the Centre could become operational and serve the Region (para 54);

1.9 Urged member countries of the Region to strengthen their capabilities in the assessment and monitoring of the food and nutrition situation in their respective nations, as well as in the design, planning and implementation of appropriate nutrition intervention programmes (para 58);

1.10 Urged member countries to include nutritional considerations in their social and economic development plans (para 58).

2. Cereal Seed Development and Production in the Near East

The Conference:

2.1 Recommended to member governments that national research institutions should intensify their plant breeding and variety evaluation programmes for barley, maize, sorghum and millet without weakening the activities for wheat (para 70);

2.2 Urged member governments to establish concrete national policies for seed production and supply within the context of the objectives of the national agricultural development plan (para 71);

2.3 Urged member countries to adopt a sound pricing and credit policy and to improve the marketing infrastructure to ensure the maximum impact of quality seed (para 72);

2.4 Called upon member countries to pay particular attention to the production and timely marketing of commercial quantities of quality seed (para 73);

2.5 Urged member countries to cooperate in plant breeding research, variety testing, seed production, post-harvest operations and seed quality control as well as in inter-country trade in quality seed (para 75);

2.6 Recommended to member governments to develop, with FAO assistance, training programmes in all aspects of seed production at national and regional levels (para 76).

3. Training in Agricultural Planning and Project Analysis

The Conference:

3.1 Recommended to member countries that the curriculum in agricultural economics at the university level be more oriented to the requirements of planning (para 83);

3.2 Called for a strong commitment on the part of the governments to support training activities by allocating additional resources for training programmes and for the strengthening of national and regional training institutions (para 85);

3.3 Recommended to countries in the Region to undertake measures to strengthen the links between specialized institutes in exchanging trainers and training materials and in sharing facilities (para 86).

4. The Role of Rural Women in Food and Agricultural Production in the Region

The Conference:

4.1 Urged member governments to ensure that women's economic contributions should form an integral part of national sectoral plans for food and agricultural production (para 89);

4.2 Urged member governments to promulgate laws and legislations that provide for equal rights for both men and women, especially in the distribution of land and in providing access to agricultural inputs and services, including credit (para 91);

4.3 Called upon member governments to consider the development of simple credit schemes and marketing systems especially designed to promote rural women's involvement in food production (para 91);

4.4 Urged member governments to familiarize rural communities with laws, rules and regulations by giving equal rights and opportunities to men and women regarding education, employment, wages and access to services (para 92);

4.5 Recommended to member governments the inclusion of women in training programmes designed to increase the skill of the agricultural labourers (para 93);

4.6 Urged member governments to pay special attention to training of more female extension workers at university and intermediate levels (para 94);

4.7 Called upon member countries to consider ways and means to make it culturally acceptable for men to work with rural women through effective use of public media, working groups or a team approach (para 94);

4.8 Recommended to member governments the strengthening of in-service training programmes for both male and female extension staff so as to acquaint them with the problems and needs of rural women and families (para 95);

4.9 Urged member governments to strengthen women's units in agricultural extension departments and to establish such units if they have not as yet done so (para 96);

4.10 Urged member countries to ensure cooperation and collaboration between ministries and institutions concerned with women's activities, and between agricultural extension departments and women's extension units, in promoting the role of women in agricultural and food production (para 97);

4.11 Urged member governments to conduct surveys and sample studies in providing the essential data base required by planners and decision-makers (para 98);

4.12 Called upon member governments to cooperate in the exchange of information, experience and educational material pertinent to the role of women in agricultural development (para 99).

5. Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

The Conference:

5.1 Noted that Egypt would continue to represent the Region for 1987 and 1988, expressed its thanks to the outgoing Representative of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Dr A. Maddur, and elected Turkey to represent the Region for the period 1987-1990 (para 103).

B. FOR THE ATTENTION OF FAO

1. FAO Programme in the Region

The Conference:

1.1 Requested FAO to continue and further strengthen its cooperation with national, regional and international institutions in the field of land and water development (para 38);

1.2 Called upon FAO to assist in the policy and technical aspects for planning, development and management of water resources for agricultural development in the Region (para 39);

1.3 Requested FAO to continue and further strengthen its regional activities and technical assistance to member countries in plant genetic resources and breeding (para 40);

1.4 Requested FAO to make every effort towards strengthening its activities in the important area of field crops (para 41);

1.5 Requested FAO to strengthen its assistance to member countries in improving their range resources through (a) upgrading skills and providing practical knowledge to national technical staff, (b) developing a coordinated programme for evaluation and conservation of forage genetic resources, and (c) introducing biological nitrogen fixation in pasture and fodder crops (para 42);

1.6 Requested FAO to intensify and expand its activities in the production of disease-free planting material so as to enable member countries to operate programmes for production, maintenance and distribution of healthy planting material (para 43);

1.7 Requested FAO to assist member countries in promoting rational and safe use of pesticides and, where feasible, in the adoption of integrated pest management techniques (para 44);

1.8 Requested FAO to continue its support to the Near East Regional Cooperative Research and Development Network on Small Ruminants until it becomes fully operational (para 47);

1.9 Urged FAO to continue its support to the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA) until it becomes fully operational (para 49);

1.10 Requested FAO to assist member countries in developing national capabilities in modern sciences and advanced techniques, particularly in genetic engineering, computer applications, remote sensing, micro-propagation, etc. (para 50);

1.11 Requested FAO to assist member countries in the assessment of energy requirements for agricultural development and the use of renewable energy in agriculture (para 51);

1.12 Requested FAO to continue its efforts in the establishment of the Regional Network of National Institutes for Agro-Industries Development in the Near East Region (para 52);

1.13 Requested FAO to assist member countries in developing a mechanized food crop production concept within a framework of improved farming systems (para 53);

1.14 Requested FAO to cultivate its contacts with the governments to secure their responses to the agreement of the Regional Centre on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in the Near East (para 54);

1.15 Requested FAO to continue providing technical support to the Near East/North Africa Regional Agricultural Credit Association (NENARACA) (para 55);

1.16 Requested FAO to continue assisting member countries in strengthening the organizational and management aspects of the education/extension system, in developing functional linkages between extension and research and in promoting technical cooperation among countries of the Region (para 56);

1.17 Requested FAO to further strengthen its assistance to governmental and non-governmental organizations in promoting women's economic and social roles (para 57);

1.18 Requested FAO to continue its assistance in enhancing regional training programmes in agricultural planning and project analysis and in devising a strategy for agricultural development cooperation in the Arab World (para 59);

1.19 Called upon FAO to continue its efforts in analysing the impact of labour mobility from non-oil to oil-exporting countries in agricultural development in the Region (para 59);

1.20 Requested FAO to include in the report of its activities, a statement on the state of food and agriculture in the Region during the preceding biennium (para 60);

1.21 Requested FAO to examine the feasibility of countries bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden in joining the Indian Ocean Fishery Commission (IOFC) so that a sub-regional arrangement, similar to the IOFC Committee for the Development and Management of the Gulfs, may be worked out as a successor to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Fisheries Development Project which terminated in 1985 (para 61);

1.22 Requested the Director-General of FAO to take the recommendations of the following Regional Commissions into consideration when formulating future programmes for the Region (para 65):

- First Session of the Near East Regional Commission on Agriculture,
Cairo, Egypt, 30 March - 2 April 1985

- Eighth Session of the Regional Commission on Land and Water Use in the Near East, Nicosia, Cyprus, 10 - 12 October 1985

- First Session of the Near East Regional Economic and Social Policy Commission, Damascus, Syria, 9 - 12 December 1985;

1.23 Reaffirmed its previous request for FAO to continue in the future reporting on action taken on the recommendations made by the Conference at the preceding session (para 66);

- > 1.24 Requested FAO to resume its contacts with potential donors in the Near East Region with a view to reviving the Near East Cooperative Programme (para 67);

2. Cereal Seed Development and Production in the Near East

The Conference:

2.1 Requested FAO to assist in the organization of seed seminars which could lay the foundation for national seed policies (para 76).

3. Training in Agricultural Planning and Project Analysis

The Conference:

3.1 Requested FAO to continue its efforts in assisting member countries in the quantitative assessment of availabilities and needs of trained manpower in agricultural planning and project analysis (para 81);

3.2 Requested FAO to assist member countries of the Region in the establishment of a regional network of training institutes in order to strengthen the national training institutional capacity (para 87).

4. The Role of Women in Food and Agricultural Production in the Region

The Conference:

4.1 Requested FAO to continue and further strengthen its assistance to member countries through the replicable projects being implemented in the Region, particularly those addressing women's multiple role as agricultural and food producers and as mothers and home makers (para 90);

4.2 Requested FAO to consider possible ways and means to enhance regional cooperation in the exchange of information, experience and educational material pertinent to the role of women in agricultural development (para 99);

4.3 Requested FAO to continue and further intensify its efforts to assist member countries in (a) promoting women's integration in agricultural and rural development plans and projects, (b) improving the data base on women in agricultural and household activities, (c) including women as a target group, whenever feasible, in the preparation of agricultural projects, including animal production, fisheries and forestry, and (d) implementing the "Forward Looking Strategy" adopted by the Nairobi Conference to Review and Appraise the Women's Decade (July 1985) (para 100).

5. Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

The Conference:

5.1 Requested FAO to keep up its efforts to ensure the effective representation of the Region at the CGIAR and facilitate feedback to member countries (para 102).

6. Date and Place of the Nineteenth FAO Regional Conference

The Conference:

6.1 Taking into account the offer of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, requested the Director-General of FAO to determine the date and place of the Nineteenth FAO Regional Conference in consultation with Member Governments of the Region (para 105).

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Inauguration of the Conference

1. The Eighteenth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East was held in the Istanbul Sheraton Hotel, Istanbul, Turkey, from 17 to 21 March 1986, at the kind invitation of the Government.
2. The Conference was inaugurated by H.E. Turgut Ozal, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey. The inaugural ceremony was attended by Heads of Delegations and representatives of FAO Member Nations in the Region, Observers from a number of other member countries, and from regional and international governmental and non-governmental organizations and bodies (Appendix B). Also present were Cabinet members, high ranking state officials and heads/representatives of diplomatic missions.
3. In his inaugural speech H.E. Turgut Ozal, the Prime Minister of Turkey, welcomed the Heads and Members of Delegations and Observers to the Eighteenth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. His Excellency commended the Director-General for his dedication, dynamic and enlightened guidance of FAO, and praised the Organization's achievements in combating hunger and poverty. His Excellency reiterated that FAO merits the outstanding place it occupies within the UN family and the increasing support of all nations committed to the noble ideals which motivated its founders.
4. He also emphasized the fact that despite all efforts exerted and immense progress achieved, the problem of food insecurity was still severe, threatening global development, stability and peace. While expressing his deep appreciation for the quick and adequate relief operations organized by the world community to help the African countries afflicted by drought, he stressed that the rational approach was to assist countries to develop their agricultural sector in order to increase their abilities to produce more food. National efforts should be supported by international action. He identified the main obstacles facing agricultural developing countries to include illiteracy, ignorance and lack of know-how and technology; inadequate financial and material support; widespread protectionism in international trade, especially with respect to agricultural commodities; and lack of efficient and effective economic and technical cooperation among developing countries. He emphasized the importance of economic cooperation in overcoming these obstacles, stressed the crucial role FAO can play in this connection and reiterated his deep appreciation to FAO and the Director-General for efficient administration, and wished the Conference every success.

5. Mr Edouard Saouma, Director-General of FAO, addressed the Conference at the beginning of the inaugural session and expressed his thanks to His Excellency the Prime Minister for honouring the occasion by accepting to inaugurate the meeting. He underlined Turkey's remarkable economic recovery and outstanding achievements in the agricultural sector in recent years, and noted the significance of holding two FAO regional conferences, Near East and Europe, in Istanbul within the course of this year.

Election of the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen and Appointment of the Rapporteur

6. H.E. Husnu Dogan, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Affairs of Turkey, was unanimously elected Chairman of the Conference.

7. H.E. Husnu Dogan expressed his thanks and appreciation for the confidence entrusted in him through his election as Chairman of the Conference.

8. In his statement, H.E. Husnu Dogan said that Turkey was privileged to host two FAO Regional Conferences in the course of this year immediately following the 40th Anniversary of FAO. He referred to the meetings in Istanbul of the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Islamic Conference and the second Ministerial Conference on Food Security and Agricultural Development which had just been concluded, and noted that most of the resolutions adopted in these meetings were closely related to the areas of competence of FAO. He, thus, expressed the hope that FAO will continue to play an increasing role in furthering cooperation among Islamic countries in the field of agriculture and food security. He expressed his appreciation to FAO for convening such an important gathering in Istanbul and wished the Conference every success.

9. The Conference resolved that all Heads of Delegations act as Vice-Chairmen.

10. The Conference appointed Mr Gamal M. Ahmed, member of the Sudan Delegation, as Rapporteur.

Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

11. The Conference adopted the Agenda (Appendix A) as presented by the Secretariat and the Timetable after minor amendments.

Statement by the Director-General

12. In his opening statement (Appendix D) the Director-General expressed his gratitude to H.E. Prime Minister Turgut Ozal and his Government for hosting the Conference in Istanbul.

13. The Director-General congratulated H.E. Husnu Dogan, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Affairs of Turkey, for his unanimous election as Chairman of the Conference. He also congratulated the distinguished Vice-Chairmen for their election.

14. The Director-General welcomed the distinguished Ministers, Heads and Members of Delegations and Observers.

15. He then dwelt on the food and agricultural situation in the countries of the Region. He pointed out that the results of government efforts were noteworthy; basic requirements were met and nutrition standards improved. Consumption, however, outstripped the increase in agricultural production and the Region became, in two decades, largely dependent on food imports that amounted to approximately US\$ 23 billion in 1984.

16. He drew attention to the political conflicts in the Region and the allocation of substantial funds to defense, as well as the abundance of oil in the Region that lured a major part of the labour force away from agriculture and encouraged food imports rather than food production. He referred to the recent dramatic slump in oil revenues and its effects on investment and employment. All these problems led to the grave financial crisis currently affecting many countries of the Region.

17. Nevertheless, this crisis could have a positive aspect. It was a sharp reminder that the Region was vulnerable to economic fluctuations of the developed countries. He mentioned that agricultural development, a cornerstone of harmonious development, had been, however, too long neglected.

18. He then turned to the three main Agenda items before the Conference: training in agricultural planning and project analysis, cereal seed development and production, and the role of rural women in agriculture.

19. The Director-General considered agricultural planning a major instrument in the precise definition of sectorial policies. Likewise, good project preparation was an essential factor when considering the advisability of investments. He pointed out that it was important to maintain high standards in this field and FAO was prepared, as in the past, to assist governments in this respect.

20. Referring to the second topic, the Director-General emphasized the fact that improved seeds played an important role in boosting yields. Despite substantial efforts, improved seeds, particularly cereal seeds, were not yet widely used. Progress in this field would have considerable impact on production and consequently on food security in the Region.

21. The third topic, rural women in agriculture, was of particular significance in the Near East Region since women had filled the vacuum left by male emigrants without having any special training in the field, despite their traditional involvement in agriculture. The paper on this subject examined possible national and regional measures for improving the working conditions and status of women in the Near East.

22. In conclusion, the Director-General stated that much remained to be done in the Region. Agricultural development policies needed to be reviewed and adapted to present day constraints; appropriate technologies must be developed to realize the optimum utilization of soils and waters; farmers must be trained and their spirit of enterprise encouraged. The Director-General pledged FAO's support to Member Governments as they reflected upon these questions.

COUNTRY STATEMENTS AND GENERAL DEBATE

23. All Delegates expressed their thanks and gratitude to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey for inaugurating the Conference. They also expressed appreciation to the Government for hosting the meeting and for the generous hospitality offered to the participants as well as for the excellent facilities provided.

24. All Delegates praised FAO for its achievements in promoting agriculture and rural development in the Near East Region. They unanimously commended the Director-General for his outstanding efforts to meet the needs of the Region, for his comprehensive opening statement and for the excellent organization of the Conference. The Delegates reiterated their full confidence and appreciation for his dynamic leadership and dedication to the fulfillment of the objectives and cause of FAO in the Region. They expressed their strong wish that their countries would continue to benefit from his services for the years ahead.

25. Many Delegates briefly outlined the progress achieved in the food and agriculture sector of their countries. It was generally considered, however, that despite achievements, further efforts were required to increase the degree of self-sufficiency in major food items.

26. While appreciating the valuable aid donated by the world community to countries affected by drought, the Conference emphasized the need to assist these countries to develop their food and agriculture sectors, increase their ability to produce more food and improve their preparedness. The Conference, therefore, appreciated the Agricultural Rehabilitation Programme for Africa launched by FAO in early 1985 and expressed the hope that the Programme would continue and its resources increased until food production in the countries concerned was sufficiently improved and stabilized.

27. Many delegates were concerned about the political conflicts in the Region and called for a just and comprehensive peace so that member nations could devote their efforts and resources to economic development.

28. Many Delegates expressed concern over the stalemate reached in FAO contacts with potential donors in the Region in reviving the Near East Cooperative Programme which had rendered invaluable service in the Region.

29. Many Delegates welcomed the International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides which was approved by the Twenty-third Session of the FAO Conference. It was viewed as a useful and timely achievement particularly in situations where there were no regulations or necessary infrastructure at the country level. In this connection, the Delegates underlined the benefits of using integrated pest control techniques wherever feasible.
30. Some Delegates noted with concern the widening gap between population growth and food production in the Region and emphasized the role of agricultural development planning in closing the gap.
31. Some Delegates noted the adverse effects of protectionism in the agricultural commodity market by the developed countries and stressed the need to actively promote greater self-reliance and intra-regional trade.
32. Many Delegates emphasized the need to review agricultural price policies in member countries with a view to providing adequate incentives to stimulate agricultural production.
33. Some Delegates recognized that in view of progress made in the agricultural sector in many countries, the type of technical assistance required became, by necessity, of a technically advanced nature.
34. Some Delegates called for rational utilization of energy resources in agriculture and suggested considering alternative sources, such as solar energy and wind.
35. Many Delegates urged regional financial institutions to increase the share of their investment allocation to agricultural development in the Region.
36. Observers from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), International Labour Organisation (ILO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Arab Centre for Studies of Arid Zones and Drylands (ACSAD), and the Arab Agricultural Engineers Federation highlighted their activities in areas pertinent to the subject matter of agenda items, praised ongoing cooperative activities between their respective organizations and FAO, and proposed further areas of cooperation.

FAO PROGRAMME IN THE REGION

Report on FAO Activities in the Region Including Action Taken on the Main Recommendations made by the Seventeenth Regional Conference and Programme of Work for 1986-87

(Documents NERC/86/2 and NERC/86/2 Sup.1)

37. The Conference considered Document NERC/86/2 on "Report on FAO Activities in the Region including Action taken on the Main Recommendations made by the Seventeenth Regional Conference and Programme of Work for 1986-87". It expressed appreciation for the wide scope of its contents and the concise presentation of the varied activities undertaken in the Region. It noted with appreciation that the Programme of Work and Budget for the biennium 1984/85 in the Near East Region was satisfactorily implemented through active collaboration between the Regional Office for the Near East (RNEA) and the technical units of FAO Headquarters.

38. The Conference duly noted the activities implemented in the field of land and water development. It noted, in particular, the various initiatives undertaken in cooperation with national, regional and international institutions, and requested FAO to continue this policy and further strengthen its collaboration with these institutions.

39. The Conference emphasized the need to rationalize the use of the scarce water resources and called upon FAO to assist in the policy and technical aspects of planning, development and management of water resources for agricultural development in the Region.

40. The Conference recognized the significance of plant genetic resources in increasing food production and promoting agricultural development. It requested FAO to continue and further strengthen its regional activities and technical assistance to member countries in this field. It stressed the need to link plant genetic resources with effective plant breeding and seed production activities.

41. The Conference noted the wide scope for strengthening activities in the important areas of field crops and requested FAO to make every effort towards this end.

42. The Conference observed with satisfaction the activities undertaken in the fields of fodder crops and rangelands. It requested FAO to further strengthen its assistance to member countries in improving their range resources through:

- upgrading skills and providing practical knowledge to national technical staff (training courses, seminars, etc.);
- developing a coordinated programme for evaluation and conservation of forage plant genetic resources;
- introducing biological nitrogen fixation in pasture and fodder crops.

43. The Conference commended FAO's initiative in strengthening its activities in the production of disease-free planting material, and requested FAO to intensify and expand such activities so as to enable member countries to operate programmes for production, maintenance and distribution of healthy planting material.

44. The Conference recognized the increased reliance on the use of pesticides as a means of controlling pests and diseases in the Region, and cautioned against the negative effects this might have on man and the environment. It requested FAO to assist member countries in promoting rational and safe use of pesticides and, where feasible, in adopting integrated pest management techniques. It urged member countries to take advantage of the recently approved International Code of Conduct for Use and Distribution of Pesticides and to enact regulations for pesticide registration and control. Training programmes should also be organized in the safe handling and application of pesticides.

45. The Conference took note of the animal health situation in the Region, in particular the occurrence and control of rinderpest and foot and mouth disease (FMD). It urged member countries to cooperate fully with FAO in implementing rinderpest campaigns.

46. The Conference urged member countries to apply strict veterinary control measures on animal trade and to coordinate inter-country action to arrest the spread of disease and epizootics across national borders.

47. The Conference expressed appreciation of the action taken by FAO to institute the Near East Regional Cooperative Research and Development Network on Small Ruminants which was, in fact, the outcome of a recommendation adopted by the First Session of the Near East Regional Commission on Agriculture (Cairo, 1985). It urged member countries interested in small ruminant production to participate in the Network through the appropriate national R and D institutions. It also requested FAO to continue its support to the Network until it becomes fully operational.

48. The Conference commended the activities initiated by the Regional Poultry Training and Development Centre established in Amman, Jordan, by FAO, from funds donated by the Government of Italy. The Conference urged member countries to make full use of the training and development support activities of the Centre.

49. The Conference appreciated the lead role of FAO and the valuable support which it extended in cooperation with ICARDA and ISNAR in the establishment of the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA). It urged FAO to continue its support until the Association becomes fully operational. The Conference also urged member countries to ensure the full participation of their national institutions in AARINENA.

50. The Conference, recognizing the virtues of modern science and advanced techniques in accelerating agricultural research and development programmes, requested FAO to assist member countries in developing national capabilities in their areas, especially in genetic engineering, computer applications, remote sensing, micro-propagation, etc.
51. The Conference also requested FAO to assist member countries in the assessment of energy requirements for agricultural development and the use of renewable energy in agriculture.
52. The Conference noted with appreciation that, following the recommendations of the Seventeenth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, FAO initiated action for the establishment of a Regional Network of National Institutes for Agro-Industries Development in the Near East Region. It urged member countries to respond positively to the Director-General's invitation to participate in the Network and to attend the Technical Consultation planned in 1986 to discuss the relevant document. The Conference requested FAO to continue its efforts in the establishment of the Network.
53. The Conference recognized the importance of mechanization in increasing food production in the Region and the need for training in this field. It requested FAO to assist member countries in developing a mechanized food crop production concept within a framework of improved farming systems.
54. The Conference took note of the progress made so far in the establishment of the Regional Centre on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in the Near East. It urged member countries to ratify the relevant agreement adopted at the Conference of Plenipotentiaries (FAO, Rome, 26-28 September 1983) so that the Centre could become operational and serve the Region. It requested FAO to cultivate its contacts with the governments in order to secure their responses.
55. The Conference commended the active role played by the Near East/North Africa Regional Agricultural Credit Association (NENARACA) in its fields of competence. It requested FAO to continue providing technical support to NENARACA in the future.
56. The Conference appreciated the work of FAO in support of agricultural education, training and extension. It requested FAO to continue assisting member countries in strengthening the organizational and management aspects of the education extension systems, in developing functional linkages between extension and research and in promoting technical cooperation among countries of the Region.
57. The Conference welcomed the strong emphasis placed on the role of rural women in the participation in food and agricultural production and rural development. It requested FAO to further strengthen its assistance to governmental and non-governmental organizations in promoting women's economic and social roles.

58. The Conference urged member countries of the Region to strengthen their capabilities in the assessment and monitoring of the food and nutrition situation as well as in the design, planning and implementation of appropriate nutrition intervention programmes. It also urged member countries to include nutritional considerations in their social and economic development plans.

59. The Conference appreciated FAO's technical assistance to member countries in the field of food and agricultural policy. It requested FAO to continue its assistance in enhancing regional training programmes in agricultural planning and project analysis, and in devising a strategy for agricultural development cooperation in the Arab World. The Conference also called upon FAO to continue its efforts in analysing the impact of labour mobility from non-oil to oil-exporting countries on the agricultural development of the Region.

60. The Conference requested FAO to include a statement on the state of food and agriculture in the Region during the preceding biennium in the report of its activities.

61. The Conference requested FAO to examine the feasibility of countries bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden in joining the Indian Ocean Fishery Commission (IOFC) so that a sub-regional arrangement, similar to the IOFC Committee for the Development and Management of the Gulfs, could be worked out as a successor to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Fisheries Development Project which terminated in 1985.

62. The Conference noted that FAO's activities in the Region reflect the concern for urgent action in the priority areas of desertification control, rehabilitation of arid zones and marginal lands, promotion of rural development with particular reference to agrisilviculture, silvopasture management, fuelwood and charcoal production by local communities, training of trainers and exchange of information, including linkages with other arid and semi-arid zones of the world. The Conference welcomed the studies on wood energy and the trials of forest and fodder tree species, the guidelines for agro-silvo-pastoralism, the survey of wildlife related training needs, as well as the assessment of the forest resources of five North African countries. The Conference expressed its appreciation for the support provided to several countries by the FAO project on Genetic Resources of Arid and Semi-Arid Zone Arboreal Species.

63. The Conference noted with satisfaction the activities of the ESCWA/FAO Joint Agriculture Division. It commended, in particular, the growing spirit of cooperation between ESCWA and FAO in fields of common interest.

64. The Conference endorsed the recommendations of the following Regional Commissions which met during the 1984-85 biennium.

- . First Session of the Near East Regional Commission on Agriculture, Cairo, Egypt, 30 March - 2 April 1985

- . Eighth Session of the Regional Commission on Land and Water Use in the Near East, Nicosia, Cyprus, 10 - 12 October 1985
- . First Session of the Near East Regional Economic and Social Policy Commission, Damascus, Syria, 9 - 12 December 1985.

65. The Conference requested the Director-General of FAO to take these recommendations into consideration when formulating future programmes for the Region.

66. The Conference expressed its appreciation for FAO's effective and timely implementation of the recommendations of the Seventeenth Regional Conference for the Near East (Aden, PDR Yemen, March 1984). It reaffirmed its request to continue reporting on action taken on the recommendations made by the Conference at its preceding session in the future.

67. The Conference requested FAO to resume its contacts with potential donors in the Near East Region with a view to reviving the Near East Cooperative Programme.

68. The Conference recognized that the PWB 1986/87 for the Near East Region had been already discussed and approved by the Twenty-third Session of the FAO Conference. It wished, nevertheless, to reiterate its endorsement and support of the Director-General's Programme proposals and to express its confidence that these proposals will be fully implemented.

SELECTED ISSUES OF AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Cereal Seed Development and Production in the Near East

69. The Conference considered Document NERC/86/3 on "Cereal Seed Development and Production in the Near East" and reaffirmed the key role of quality seeds in improving crop production and productivity, and as a result, in enhancing food security.

70. The Conference noted that many wheat varieties, particularly for irrigated areas, were identified for the different agro-ecological zones of the Region. It recommended to member governments that national research institutions intensify their plant breeding and variety evaluation programmes for barley, maize, sorghum and millet without weakening the activities for wheat.

71. The Conference emphasized that a functioning seed programme was an essential prerequisite for the development of improved crop production. Special attention should be given to hybrid varieties. It urged member governments to establish concrete national policies for seed production and supply within the context of the objectives of the national agricultural development plan.

72. The Conference recognized that improved yields were of value only when the surplus could be marketed in an orderly manner to bring prosperity to the producer and to those in the marketing chain. The Conference, therefore, urged member countries to adopt a sound pricing and credit policy and to improve the marketing infrastructure to ensure the maximum impact of quality seed.

73. The Conference called upon member countries to pay particular attention to the production and timely marketing of commercial quantities of quality seed. It stressed the eminent role of executive, legislative and juridical actions to eliminate impediments to seed programme development, to permit the participation of the non-governmental sector including cooperatives and private companies, to make quality seeds accessible to producers, and to increase the incentives for farmers to use them.

74. The Conference recognized that model farms and an efficient extension service, with sufficient knowledge of seed matters, was required for widespread use of improved seeds.

75. The Conference called for strengthening regional cooperation in plant breeding research, variety testing, seed production, post-harvest operations and seed quality control, including seed testing and certification and distribution. It further urged member countries to cooperate in regional planning to stimulate inter-country trade in quality seed. Some countries proposed the establishment of joint ventures to promote inter-country trade in quality seed.

76. The Conference recommended to member governments to develop training programmes in all aspects of seed production at national and regional levels. It requested FAO to assist in the organization of seed seminars which could lay the foundation for national seed policies.

Training in Agricultural Planning and Project Analysis

77. The Conference considered document NERC/86/4 on "Training in Agricultural Planning and Project Analysis in the Near East and North Africa Region" which reviewed the main objectives of training, the growing need for trained personnel in agricultural planning and project analysis, the quantitative assessments of these needs and the national and FAO efforts to enhance training capability.

78. The Conference noted that the main objectives of training include:

- . creation of a "critical mass" of trained personnel sufficient to have an impact on agricultural and rural development;
- . improvement of national capacity for agricultural planning, including plan formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- . improvement of project identification, formulation, evaluation and analysis to improve the national absorptive capacity of investment;

- . building up of institutional capability and attaining self-reliance in training capacity.

79. The Conference recognized the growing need for training personnel in agricultural planning and project analysis in the Region. It also noted the factors underpinning the growing needs, which included renewed emphasis on agricultural development, the need to increase the absorptive capacity and to decentralize planning, the need to bridge the gap between plan formulation and implementation, and to meet the increasing demand for manpower due to the migration of trained personnel within and outside the Region.

80. The Conference emphasized to member countries the importance of conducting quantitative assessments of trained manpower availability and needs. It also stressed that the assessment should take into account the functions performed or expected to be performed, the range of skills required to carry out the planning functions, the existing number of planning officers, the expected turnover, the demand for new recruits and the budgetary constraints.

81. The Conference requested FAO to continue its efforts in assisting member countries in the quantitative assessment of availabilities and needs of trained manpower in agricultural planning and project analysis.

82. The Conference noted with satisfaction the efforts of national, regional and international training institutes as well as some development funds and banks in the Region in strengthening capability in agricultural planning and project analysis.

83. The Conference recommended to member countries that the curriculum in agricultural economics at the university level be more oriented to the requirements of planning so as to have a more developed educational base for training.

84. The Conference expressed satisfaction with FAO's assistance to member countries in enhancing their training capacity in agricultural planning and project analysis. It appreciated FAO's emphasis on in-service training which enabled reaching a large number of planners to acquire specialized skills while continuing to perform their normal duties. It also appreciated FAO's active cooperation with national and regional training institutions in conducting training for trainers programmes, in emphasizing monitoring and follow-up activities and in the provision of training materials (increasingly in Arabic).

85. The Conference noted with concern that in spite of the national, regional and international efforts to intensify training activities, the need for training in agricultural planning and project analysis continued to grow. It called for a strong commitment on the part of the governments to support training activities, which should be reflected in the allocation of additional resources for training and strengthening of national and regional training institutions.

86. The Conference emphasized the need for further regional cooperation in training, and recommended to countries of the Region to undertake measures to strengthen the links between specialized institutes, which might take the form of exchange of trainers, training materials and sharing of facilities.

87. The Conference requested FAO to assist member countries of the Region in the establishment of a regional network of training institutes in order to strengthen the national institutional capacity in training.

The Role of Rural Women in Food and Agricultural Production in the Region

88. The Conference considered document NERC/86/5 on "The Role of Women in Food and Agricultural Production in the Region". The document indicated that women in the Near East played an important role in food and agricultural production, that emigration of men from rural areas to cities or to other countries promoted changes in the composition of labour force and the division of labour by gender, and that the productive role of women in agriculture was not well recognized and therefore not fully accounted for in the national development plans.

89. The Conference noted, however, that women's role in food and agricultural production was gaining more importance and recognition in countries of the Region. It stressed the fact that helping women to increase their productivity would promote food security and agricultural development. It urged member governments to ensure that women's economic contribution should form an integral part of national sectoral plans for food and agricultural production.

90. The Conference commended the innovative and replicable projects being implemented in the Region, particularly those addressing women's multiple roles as agricultural and food producers and as mothers and home-makers, and requested FAO to continue and further strengthen its assistance to member countries in this field.

91. The Conference urged member governments to promulgate laws and legislation that provide for equal rights for both men and women, in particular in the distribution of land and access to agricultural inputs and services including credit. It called upon member governments to consider the development of simple credit schemes and marketing systems especially designed to promote rural women's involvement in food production.

92. The Conference urged member governments to familiarize rural communities with laws, rules and regulations that grant equal rights and opportunities to men and women in education, employment, wages and access to services.

93. The Conference recommended to member governments the inclusion of women in training programmes designed to increase the skill of the agricultural labourers.

94. The Conference recognized the need for trained female extension personnel to promote women's programmes. It urged member governments to pay special attention to training of more female extension workers at university and intermediate levels. It also called upon member countries to consider ways and means to make it culturally acceptable for men to work with rural women through the effective use of public media, working groups or team approach.

95. The Conference recommended to member governments strengthening in service training programmes for both male and female extension staff to acquaint themselves with the problems and needs of rural women and families.

96. The Conference welcomed the establishment of women's units in the agricultural extension departments in some countries of the Region and urged member governments to strengthen these units and to establish them where they had been non-existent.

97. The Conference took note of women's activities at the village level, the role of concerned ministries, and the role of women's non-governmental organizations. It urged member countries to ensure cooperation and collaboration between these institutions and the agricultural extension departments and women's extension units, in the promotion of the role of women in agricultural and food production.

98. The Conference noted that statistics on some key issues related to the status and role of rural women in agricultural and food production were insufficient in many countries of the Region. It urged member governments to conduct surveys and sample studies to provide the essential data base required by planners and decision-makers.

99. The Conference called upon member governments to cooperate in the exchange of information, experience and educational material pertinent to the role of women in agricultural development. It requested FAO to consider possible ways and means to enhance regional cooperation in this regard.

100. The Conference requested FAO to continue and further intensify its efforts to assist member countries in: (a) promoting women's integration in agricultural and rural development plans and projects; (b) improving the data base on women in agricultural and household activities; (c) including women as a target group, whenever feasible, in the preparation of agricultural projects including animal production, fisheries and forestry; and (d) implementing the "Forward Looking Strategies" adopted by the Nairobi Conference, to review and appraise the Women's Decade (Nairobi, Kenya, July 1985).

Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

101. The Conference considered document NERC/86/6 entitled "Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)". It also took note of the reports submitted by Dr Abdel Rahim Shehata (Egypt) in his capacity as Representative of the Region at the two CGIAR Meetings (Tokyo, 12 - 14 June 1985 and Washington D.C., 28 October - 1 November 1985).

102. The Conference appreciated the recent developments in the CGIAR system and the improvement that took place in the attendance and participation of the Near East Region at the meetings. It requested FAO to keep up its efforts to ensure the effective representation of the Region at CGIAR and to facilitate feed-back of the proceedings to member countries.

103. The Conference noted that Egypt would continue to represent the Region for 1987 and 1988 and expressed its thanks to the outgoing Representative of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Dr A. Maddur. Turkey was elected to represent the Region for the period 1987-1990.

CONCLUDING ITEMS

Date and Place of the Nineteenth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

104. The Conference welcomed the kind invitation extended by His Excellency the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Sultanate of Oman to hold the Nineteenth Session of the FAO Near East Regional Conference in Muscat.

105. Taking this into account, the Director-General of FAO was requested to determine the date and place of the meeting in consultation with Member Governments of the Region.

Adoption of the Report

106. The Conference adopted the present report after introducing some minor amendments.

Closure of the Conference

107. H.E. Habib Kassim, Minister of Commerce and Agriculture, Bahrain, speaking on behalf of all the delegates, thanked the President, the Government and the people of Turkey for the generous hospitality, the warm welcome and excellent arrangements provided. He thanked His Excellency the Prime Minister for inaugurating the Conference. He paid tribute to His Excellency Husnu Dogan, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Affairs (Turkey) for his able guidance as Chairman of the Conference. He also thanked the Director-General of FAO and the Conference Secretariat for the efforts made in preparing the Conference documents and for the smooth and efficient management of the meeting.

108. Mr Salah Jum'a, FAO Regional Representative for the Near East, spoke on behalf of the Director-General. He expressed his gratitude to the Prime Minister, the Government and the people of Turkey for hosting the Conference, for the generous hospitality and for the excellent arrangements and facilities which contributed substantially to the success of the Conference. He paid tribute to the Chairman, H.E. Husnu Dogan (Turkey), the Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur whose presence and experience made this meeting a notable success. He then thanked the National Organizing Committee and the Secretariat for their efforts in ensuring the smooth running of the Conference.

109. In his closing statement, H.E. Husnu Dogan, Chairman of the Conference, reiterated his warm thanks to the Director-General of FAO and the Regional Representative for the Near East for their continued effort in making a success of the meeting. He thanked Their Excellencies the Ministers and the Heads and Members of Delegations for their active participation and invaluable contributions. He paid tribute to all those who took part in preparing and servicing the Conference. He noted that the Conference was able to discuss in depth the Agenda items and to reach concrete and constructive recommendations and conclusions.

110. The Conference Chairman announced the Conference closed at 11.00 hours on Friday, 21 March 1986.

APPENDIX A

AGENDA

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

1. Opening of the Conference
2. Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairmen and Appointment of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

II. STATEMENTS

4. Statement by the Director-General
5. Country Statements and General Debate on the State of Food and Agriculture in the Near East
6. Report by the FAO Regional Representative on FAO Activities in the Region, Including Action Taken on the Main Recommendations Made by the 17th Regional Conference, and Programme of Work for 1986-87

III. SELECTED ISSUES OF AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

7. Cereal Seed Development and Production in the Near East
8. Training in Agricultural Planning and Project Analysis
9. The Role of Rural Women in Food and Agricultural Production in the Region
10. Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

IV. CONCLUDING ITEMS

11. Any other business
12. Place and Date of the Nineteenth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East
13. Adoption of the Report
14. Closure of the Conference

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STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Mr Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Eighteenth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East opens amidst the climate of tension to which I have already referred in my first address. Let us take it as an occasion to take a frank, realistic look at the problems involved in developing agriculture and strengthening food security in the countries of the region.

His Excellency, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal, has honoured us by inaugurating our sessions. May I take this opportunity to thank him again, and to express my gratitude to him and to his Government for offering to host this Conference in the glorious city of Istanbul.

The Conference has unanimously elected His Excellency Husnu Dogan, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of Turkey, to chair the sessions. Your Excellency, I offer my sincere congratulations on your election. My colleagues in the FAO Secretariat and I are sure that your authoritative presence will do much to make this meeting a notable success. I also wish to congratulate the distinguished Vice-Presidents on their election. I am also honoured to welcome the distinguished Ministers, Heads and Members of Delegations, and Observers. I have no doubt they will take an active part in our discussions, for which I thank them in advance.

Mr Chairman,

As usual, this Conference will take note of the report of the FAO Regional Representative on the Organization's activities during the last biennium and discuss the Programme of Work for the next biennium. In addition, the Conference will debate a number of agricultural policy issues which I shall touch upon before the close of my statement. First and foremost, though, the Conference will be called upon to examine the food and agricultural situation in the countries of the region.

I should like to dwell at greater length on this point. Various circumstances inside and outside the region have exacerbated tensions in a great many countries. These circumstances have served as a forceful reminder that the rehabilitation of agricultural development and the steady improvement of food security are prime political imperatives.

In recent years, the governments of the region have made considerable efforts to cope with the unprecedented number of new mouths to feed. The results of their efforts are noteworthy; the basic requirements have been met and the latest FAO World Food Survey shows that nutrition standards in the Near East have even improved. We rightly welcome the steps taken by governments to ensure that the neediest sectors of the population have access to the basic commodities.

Consumption, however, far outstrips the increase in agricultural production. The Near East, which used to be self-sufficient in cereals, has, in the space of two decades, become widely dependent on grain imports, and the same is true for most other food products. Today, this dependency costs the region some US\$ 23 000 million.

You are well aware of the many reasons for agriculture's poor performance in the region: the harsh natural setting, drought (which has recently left its dramatic imprint on several countries), scant water resources, and the high cost of irrigation. However, agriculture's low priority when it comes to the allocation of investment funds and the mobilization of human resources has usually been one of the main reasons.

Certainly, efforts have been made, and here I should like to cite the impressive example of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has boosted its grain output in just a few years from 10 000 to 1.5 million tonnes. There have been substantial contributions from many sources. Our Organization, for example, has provided technical assistance to a number of projects and actively helped to develop such specific sectorial policies as that for cereals. However, the political context, we are forced to note, has done little to favour progress in agriculture.

For instance, as you are all aware, the region is unfortunately in the grip of numerous conflicts which cause suffering among the population while rendering the future of development programmes uncertain. Governmental funds are earmarked primarily for armaments and are thus unavailable for production. Can it be stated too often that roughly 16 percent of the Gross Domestic Product of the Near East is allocated to defense?

Nor is the abundance of oil in the region unconnected with the problems of agriculture. To take one instance, the oil industry has lured a major part of the labour force away from agriculture, with no corresponding compensation in terms of increased productivity. The abundance of oil has frequently encouraged food imports - it being easier to import food than to implement production policies - and has also encouraged investments whose priorities have not always been apparent.

Today, all these problems have snowballed. Many countries are now undergoing grave financial crises and are forced to accept severe austerity measures and to negotiate stringent economic reforms with the international financing agencies. Subsidies have plummeted nearly everywhere, and the result has been considerable pressure on the poorest sectors of the population. Add to this the dramatic slump in oil revenues and, suddenly, debt servicing becomes a heavier burden, investments and employment are under threat, and imports must be cut back.

The crisis is fraught with difficulties but may also have a healthy side. Indeed, it comes as a timely reminder that this region is vulnerable, as are the other countries of the Third World, to the economic vicissitudes of the more developed countries. It again reminds us that, without greater monetary and trade stability and a new North/South equilibrium, no real development is possible. The crisis therefore demands of us a greater sense of international solidarity.

It is also another reminder that agricultural development is the cornerstone of harmonious development, and has too long been neglected. The fact that greater food self-sufficiency is a political imperative is also brought home to us. The upshot of all this must be new policies, new priorities and a new allocation of resources. You know that FAO has unceasingly stressed the urgency of such measures. You know therefore that you have FAO's full support as you confront this challenge.

My colleague, the FAO Regional Representative, will review what has been done in the course of the last few years. Despite political constraints, many programmes have been continued and a number of meetings held. The use of Arabic, now solidly established in FAO, has certainly provided cultural cohesion. It is up to us to maintain this momentum.

I begin, then, cautiously to hope. I find myself imagining, for example, that our efforts to feed the countries of the region better may encourage those in power to do more to safeguard the results of our efforts. I find myself imagining, also, that they may contribute, in some small way, to the search for peace in this part of the world.

Mr Chairman,

Having reviewed this background to our activities, I should now like to touch briefly upon the specific items before this meeting. Three important topics are covered: training in agricultural planning and project analysis; cereal seed development and production in the Near East; and the role of rural women in agriculture.

Despite their diversity, these three themes converge to form a single problem: insufficient food production in the countries of the region.

Agricultural planning is a major instrument for more precise definition of sectorial policies. Likewise, good project preparation is an essential and decisive factor in weighing the advisability of investments. The Conference is certainly aware of the need to maintain high standards in this field, and the document before you examines the requirements and how we might respond to them. FAO, which has extensive experience in training planners, is prepared, as in the past, to assist governments.

The second topic brings us back to concrete problems of agricultural production. Improved seeds do, indeed, play an especially important role in boosting yields. The paper prepared on this subject shows that, despite substantial efforts, improved seeds - particularly cereal seeds - are not yet in sufficiently wide use. Progress in this field would certainly have a rapid impact on production and, as a result, on food security in the region. More vigorous policies to expand the production and dissemination of improved seeds would therefore be desirable. The working document before you suggests practical measures for implementing such policies. FAO, which is already doing a great deal of work in the area of seed policies, naturally stands ready to increase its assistance should governments so require.

The third item for discussion is of particular interest in the Near Eastern context. Indeed, one striking consequence of the profound economic and social upheaval within the region is the upward swing in labour migration, a trend which has affected many rural areas. Women, already traditionally active in agriculture, have had to take the place of male emigrants without any special training to prepare them for their new and increasingly weighty role in agriculture. The paper on this problem examines possible national and regional measures for improving the working conditions and status of women. However, unless the cultural traditions and social transformations peculiar to each country are carefully taken into account, such measures can have little practical application.

I have no doubt that the Conference will thoroughly discuss these three items. I am equally certain that practical and realistic proposals will be the outcome.

Mr Chairman,

As you know, last November FAO celebrated its fortieth anniversary with full solemnity conferred upon the occasion by the presence of several Heads of State. This Regional Conference is the first important meeting of FAO's fifth decade. I think this is symbolic; the Near East has in fact occupied a special place in the history of agriculture since its earliest beginnings, and the world owes to this region an impressive number of innovations. I personally am proud to call myself a native son of the region.

Today, the Near East faces stern challenges, but I am confident it will find in the spirit of its people the wherewithal to take up the challenge. The age-old history of the region certainly justifies this hope.

Much remains to be done. Agricultural development policies need to be reviewed and adapted to present-day constraints. To make the most of the region's soils and particularly its waters, the right technologies must be developed. Farmers must also be trained and their spirit of enterprise encouraged.

You know that FAO is behind you every step of the way as you reflect upon all these problems. And you also know that, by collaborating with FAO, you could make better use of that priceless common asset which consists of each country's wisdom and experience.

It is in this spirit that I wish your Conference every success.

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