

NERC/06/REP
March 2006

REPORT OF THE
TWENTY- EIGHTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE
FOR THE NEAR EAST

Sana'a, Republic of Yemen, 12-16 March 2006

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAO Regional Office for the Near East

Cairo 2006

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Date and place of FAO Regional Conferences for the Near East

First	- Cairo, Egypt, 2-14 February 1948
Second	- Bloudane, Syria, 28 August - 6 September 1951
Third	- Cairo, Egypt, 1-9 September 1953
Fourth	- Damascus, Syria*, 10-20 December 1958
Fifth	- Tehran, 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
Nineteenth	- Muscat, Oman, 13-17 March 1988
Twentieth	- Tunis, Tunisia, 12-16 March 1990
Twenty-first	- Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 17-21 May 1992
Twenty-second	- Amman, Jordan, 3-6 July 1994
Twenty-third	- Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, 26-29 March 1996
Twenty-fourth	- Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, 21-25 March 1998
Twenty-fifth	- Beirut, Lebanon, 20-24 March 2000
Twenty-sixth	- Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 9-13 March 2002
Twenty-seventh	- Doha, State of Qatar, 13-17 March 2004
Twenty-eighth	- Sana'a, Republic of Yemen, 12-16 March 2006

* Known as the United Arab Republic from 01/03/1958 to 28/09/1961.

** Known as the United Arab Republic until 02/09/1971.

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made by the Twenty-eighth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East were as follows:

1. General Debate and Recommendations

1.1 For the attention of Member States

- Due to the wealth of plant and animal genetic resources in the Region, the Conference **called upon** Member Countries to strengthen their national documentation, registration and exchange of information and expertise among existing Gene Banks in some countries of the Region.

1.2 For the attention of FAO

- The Conference expressed its deep concerns about the grave consequences facing Palestinian agriculture and **requested** FAO to move from providing emergency projects to more long-term projects for the rehabilitation and development of the sector.
- The Conference took note of the recent serious drought affecting some parts of Somalia and threatening the food security and livelihoods of a large number of population. The Conference **requested** FAO to take immediate action to provide the necessary emergency assistance to the affected population.

2. Report of the Senior Officers Meeting

The Conference adopted the report of the Senior Officers Meeting with the following recommendations:

2.1 Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Controlling Trans-boundary Animal Diseases, with Special Reference to Avian Influenza

2.1.1 For the attention of Member States

The Meeting **called upon** Member States of the Region to:

- continue cooperation with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) to ensure that recently established and/or upgraded veterinary laboratories in some countries of the Region would be certified as regional Reference Laboratories and to ensure that all countries of the Region would benefit from the services of these Reference Laboratories;

- formulate and adopt comprehensive national emergency preparedness plans for dealing with possible incursions of Avian Influenza in non-infected countries, and, in infected countries, ensure effective and diligent implementation of these plans to control and ultimately eradicate the disease; and
- cooperate with FAO, OIE and other concerned international and regional agencies, as well as with other countries in the Region in generating and sharing Avian Influenza disease intelligence and experience in the prevention and control of the disease.

2.1.2 For the attention of FAO

The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- collaborate closely with the OIE and other concerned regional organizations such as AOAD, ACSAD, ICARDA, etc. in the implementation of regional activities of the Global Framework for Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs);
- ensure that GF-TAD activities in the Region give adequate support to capacity building of technical staff and upgrading of laboratories and equipment;
- provide, upon request and within available resources, technical support and advice to enhance the capacity of animal health laboratories in the Region;
- coordinate the fund-raising efforts among Member Countries and possible regional and international donors to ensure the necessary funding for launching a Phase II for the Regional Animal Disease Surveillance and Control Network (RADISCON);
- continue providing support, within available resources, to countries who need rehabilitation of their agricultural sectors and veterinary services following wars and natural disasters, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia and Sudan, including training in animal health and monitoring of veterinary drugs and vaccines;
- coordinate and manage, in collaboration with OIE and other concerned international and regional agencies, the effort in assisting countries of the Region to control and ultimately eradicate Avian Influenza from the poultry producing sectors and to prepare non-infected countries for a rapid detection of, and response to, incursions of the disease; and
- organize a coordination meeting on Avian Influenza for all countries of the Region, in collaboration with OIE, WHO and other concerned organizations, to exchange information and to closely coordinate efforts for early warning, detection and control of the disease. The Meeting welcomed Jordan's kind invitation for this coordination meeting to be held in Amman, Jordan.

2.2. Adopting Drought Mitigation Strategies in the Near East Region

2.2.1 *For the attention of Member States*

The Meeting **called upon** Member States of the region to:

- enact legislation and policies for establishing relevant national enabling mechanisms for drought mitigation preparedness strategies;
- ensure that drought mitigation preparedness strategies are in harmony with national strategies for combating desertification under the United Nations Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD);
- create the required institutional set-up for planning, implementing, coordinating and monitoring the national programmes for drought mitigation;
- consider the establishment, within available resources, of a drought watch and early warning system to assure timely alerts and preparedness at country level;
- establish adequate liaison with regional and international organizations for following up on drought mitigation activities at national, regional and global levels;
- accord due attention to the socio-economic dimension of drought, within the framework of comprehensive and integrated preparedness and mitigation plans, and address rehabilitation and development, including water resources, rangeland, livestock, forestry and crop production;
- focus on the water demand management approach and consider efficiency of water use as the basis for drought mitigation;
- increase investment in agricultural research to improve water use efficiency and crop production under water shortage conditions, and to develop drought and salt tolerant varieties as well as exploring the feasibility of cloud-seeding; and
- support the recently established Regional Network on Drought Management for the Near East and North Africa and promote regional cooperation and exchange of experiences among Member Countries.

2.2.2 *For the attention of FAO*

The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- provide policy advice and technical assistance to Member Countries, upon request and within available resources, in formulating and developing national long-term action plans for drought mitigation;
- collaborate with concerned Member Countries in developing indicators for the appropriate timing to trigger disbursements against established drought relief provisions in government budgets;

- assist Member Countries in identifying potential international and regional donor agencies interested in funding drought mitigation activities, and provide technical support in the formulation of related regional, sub-regional and national projects for submission to donors' funding;
- conduct a study to assess recent experiences in the utilization of cloud seeding as a potential tool for drought mitigation and lessons learned from Near East countries; and
- encourage collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and other concerned organizations and Member Countries, particularly in relation to climatic studies and drought forecasting, and to benefit from their technical capacity in planning and implementing capacity building activities in Member Countries.

2.3. Fisheries in the Near East Region: Situation, Constraints and Prospects

2.3.1. *For the Attention of Member States*

The Meeting **called upon** Member States to:

- establish proper databases for all aspects of the fish industry;
- reduce the number of fishing vessels so as to increase catch per boat and lower unit costs;
- conduct proper and comprehensive stock assessment surveys for marine and inland fishing areas at the national or regional levels;
- formulate, implement and enforce laws and regulations to monitor and regulate fishing efforts, including registration of vessels and fishermen and record-keeping of fishing activities;
- ensure regional cooperation and sharing of information among Member Countries in dealing with the issues of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing;
- take corrective measures to protect fisheries from environmental degradation emanating from tourism, agriculture, industry, sewage and other polluting activities;
- conduct multi-species re-stocking programmes and construct adequate landing facilities equipped with better and more appropriate services and processing plants as well as marketing and logistical information;
- encourage the private sector to increase aquaculture activities through provision of economic and administrative incentives;
- promote studies and research aimed at increasing productivity per unit area, diversifying and introducing new species, especially those of high value, and identifying the most sustainable and practical farming options;
- process fish into value-added products that meet international quality and safety

standards, including *Codex Alimentarius*, in order to have better access to lucrative exports markets in the context of global trade liberalization;

- take proper action to improve intra-regional and inter-regional trade through improving transport and storage infrastructure, improving handling practices and distribution networks, and insuring harmonization and proper enforcement of fish trade regulations;
- improve access to regional fish marketing information services such as InfoSamak, Info Fish, Info Peche and Euro-Fish; and
- encourage the establishment of national, sub-regional and regional networking, and support and coordinate with other regional bodies like InfoSamak, the Arab Fish Federation, the Arab Organization for Agriculture Development and the Agricultural and Food Marketing Association for the Near East and North Africa (AFMANENA).

2.3.2. For the Attention of FAO

The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- provide support and technical advice for conducting stock assessment surveys and preparing fishing and aquaculture databases;
- provide support for institutional capacity building in fisheries protection and the implementation of the *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries*;
- assist countries to benefit from the Fish Marketing Information Services and establish national networks;
- encourage research and provide technical advice and assistance to Member Countries to help them overcome pollution and disease problems associated with aquaculture, including mariculture, through the adoption of good management practices, in collaboration with the OIE, UNEP and other specialized organizations;
- provide Member Countries with technical and legal advice to assist them in dealing with the issues of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing;
- further strengthen collaboration among Member Countries of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) in its areas of competence and encourage the provision of assistance to Iraq in rebuilding and rehabilitating its fisheries institutions and infrastructure;
- collaborate with Member Countries and concerned regional and international organizations to assist Somalia to protect its fisheries resources from the extensive illegal fishing activities and to provide the needed technical assistance and advice to help the country to better protect its rich fisheries resources;
- Facilitate the sharing of information on successful experiences in aquaculture among

the countries of the Region, with particular emphasis on Egypt's pioneering experience in this field;

- coordinate with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) to ensure a speedy approval of IDB funding for the regional project on Red Sea Fisheries to complement the funding already received from other donors; and
- ensure that, within the ongoing reforms at FAO, Member Countries with an important fisheries sector, would, resource permitting, have adequate technical support from FAO, including support from the Fisheries Department at FAO Headquarters as well as from the fisheries experts based in the Regional and Sub-regional offices.

2.4. Other Matters

2.4.1. *Global and Regional Emergency Issues*

The Meeting considered a recommendation by FAO senior management that a standing item on "*Global and Regional Emergency Issues*" be introduced on the agenda of future FAO Regional Conferences. This item would address issues relating to emergencies and their impact at the global, regional and national levels and FAO's role in dealing with such issues in support of Member Countries. The Meeting noted that the Near East Region was frequently exposed to natural disasters such as droughts, earthquakes, floods, epidemics, etc., as well as man-made disasters such as wars and armed conflicts. Given the importance of alleviating the serious negative effects of such disasters on the local populations, the Meeting **endorsed** the above-mentioned recommendation.

2.4.2. *Information Notes*

The Meeting noted that past reports of the Senior Officers' Meeting included short summaries from the technical Information Notes. Given that these Notes are distributed but not discussed by the Meeting, the Meeting **recommended** that the Report should only provide a list of these documents without further elaborations.

2.4.3. *Procedures for the Participation of Observers*

It was pointed out that Observers in the Meeting were not always familiar with the procedures governing their participation in the discussions and debates of the Meeting. The Meeting **recommended** that, in future sessions of the Regional Conference, the Secretariat should prepare a short note outlining the above-mentioned procedures, to be circulated to all participants.

3. Discussion and Debate on a Pressing Issue in the Region: "Implications of the

Recent Developments in the Global and Regional Trading Environment for Food Security and Agricultural Development in the Near East”

3.1. *For the Attention of Member States*

The Conference **called upon** Member States to:

- continue strengthening the technical and institutional capacities of the units, within Ministries of Agriculture, responsible for agricultural policy analysis and trade-related issues to support the national team responsible for the WTO related negotiations, as well as to incorporate trade implications in the mainstream of agriculture;
- promote adequate measures to enhance agricultural investments and ensure financing of national agricultural development programmes;
- discuss with international and regional financing institutions the possibilities for supporting national, sub-regional and regional capacity building activities in areas related to multilateral trade negotiations, in collaboration with FAO

3.2. *For the Attention of FAO*

The Conference **requested** FAO to:

- consider providing capacity building support to Member Countries of the Region in multilateral trade negotiations and regional trade agreements, within available resources;
- assess, upon completion of ongoing WTO negotiations on modalities on agriculture, the potential impact of the Doha Round commitments on agricultural trade and food security in the Near East countries; and
- assist countries of the Region in facilitating exchange of information and lessons learned between WTO member countries and countries considering accession to the WTO, as well as between the Mediterranean countries, which have long experience of partnership with the EU, and other countries of the region.

4. Proposed List of Topics to be Considered at the 29th Regional Conference for the Near East

The Conference formed a Committee, consisting of representatives of five Member States (Iran, Morocco, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen) plus a member of FAO Secretariat, to assist in collecting proposed topics by Member Countries and to prepare a list of topics for consideration by the Conference. The Conference reviewed the various topics compiled by the Committee and **requested** the Secretariat to submit the approved condensed list of topics (shown below) to FAO/HQ for consideration and possible inclusion in the Conference Agenda for the 29th Regional Conference for the Near East:

- a) Strategic framework for sustainable agricultural development and food security in the Near East: programmes, emerging policy issues and future prospects.
- b) Agricultural investment in the Near East: current situation, constraints and future prospects.
- c) Recent developments in world trade environment and implications of sustainable agricultural development and food security in the region.
- d) Groundwater management and governance in the Near East: experience and lessons learned.
- e) Ensuring food safety in the Near East: challenges and opportunities.
- f) Aquaculture: a review of successful pilot experiences in some Near East countries.
- g) Strengthening and reform of National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems: Global trends and regional developments.
- h) Rangeland management, monitoring and evaluation for combating desertification and sustainable use of biodiversity.
- i) Socio-economic impacts of transboundary animal diseases in the Near East
- j) Post harvest losses in the Near East: challenges and food security implications.
- k) Integrated utilization of agricultural residues: contribution to small scale agro-industries and sustainable agricultural development in the region.
- l) Agricultural Knowledge and Information Management Systems in the Near East: Recent Experiences and Lessons Learned.

5. Date and Place of the 29th FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

The Conference welcomed the invitation extended by the Governments of Egypt, Libya, Pakistan and Turkey to host the Twenty-ninth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. Other governments have indicated their interest to present their country as a host to NERC-29 as well. The Conference **requested** that the Director-General of FAO takes all submissions into consideration when deciding on the date and place of the coming Conference, in consultation with Member Governments of the Region.

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Organization of the Conference

1. The Twenty-eighth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East was held in Sana'a, the Republic of Yemen, from 12 to 16 March 2006 at the kind invitation of the Government of the Republic of Yemen. The Conference was attended by 140 delegates from 22 countries, and 20 observers. The list of participants is given in Appendix B to this Report.

Inaugural Ceremony

2. The Inaugural Ceremony was attended by representatives of Member Countries, observers, high-ranking state officials, heads and representatives of diplomatic missions in the Republic of Yemen, representatives of UN and Regional Organizations and representatives from the news media.

3. The Conference was inaugurated by His Excellency Mr. Abdul Kader Bagammal, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Yemen, and was also addressed by Dr. Jacques Diouf, the FAO Director-General, Dr. Galal Fakirah, Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation in the Republic of Yemen and by Mr. Noori Naeini, the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council.

4. His Excellency Dr. Fakirah expressed his sincere thanks to FAO and its Regional Office for the Near East for convening this FAO Regional Conference in Yemen. He pointed out that this Conference is held at a time when the world is facing great challenges and complications, including in the Near East, and expressed his hope that the outcome of the Conference would form a good basis for joint regional actions to deal with these challenges and constraints. The Minister also highlighted the agricultural development policy reforms adopted by Yemen in addition to the recent National Medium Term Plan (NMTP) developed in the context of a collaboration between FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation

5. The Conference was also addressed by Mr. Noori Naieni, the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, who began his statement by highlighting the significant heritage of Yemen and the Near East as a whole to agriculture. Mr. Naieni stressed the great disparities in the world today, where in the midst of prosperity and abundance, hunger and undernourishment prevail in large segments of societies. To address these challenges, he referred to FAO as a good nursery for cultivation of peace and defeating hunger and poverty. However, lack of political will and inappropriate structures have largely affected FAO's efforts in this course. Mr. Naieni praised the Director General's reform package proposed to address these challenges and urged Member States to support these reforms. He also called on countries to contribute to the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) Multilateral Trust Fund. At the end of his statement, Mr. Naieni reiterated that the Director-General's reform proposals and the IEE process are mutually supportive.

6. Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, expressed his profound gratitude to His Excellency Ali Abdalla Saleh, President of the Republic of Yemen, and to the Government and people of Yemen for their warm welcome and hospitality. He also expressed his great appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Abdul Kader Bagammal, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Yemen, for giving up part of his busy schedule to participate in the Inaugural Ceremony of the Conference. Dr. Diouf praised the country's age-long history, glorious civilization and worldwide recognized agricultural heritage, and pointed out the significant strides that Yemen has made in recent years in all spheres of economic activity, particularly in the area of agricultural development.

7. In his statement, His Excellency Mr. Bagammal, the Prime Minister of Yemen, welcomed all participants on behalf of his Government and expressed that it was an honour for his country to be hosting, for the second time in twenty-two years, the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. He expressed his Government's appreciation for FAO's commendable relentless efforts in providing technical assistance and advice to countries of the Region. The Prime Minister noted with particular appreciation FAO's commendable actions in facing the Avian Influenza epidemic at both the global and regional levels. The Prime Minister also underlined the critical role that FAO plays in supporting national efforts dealing with emergencies, including drought and transboundary animal diseases. He called upon FAO and other organizations, particularly the OIE, to expand their assistance to countries of the Region so that they may be able to deal with these emergencies in the context of 'managing risks' rather than dealing with them as transitory occurrences.

8. H.E. Mr. Bagammal reviewed the significant strides that Yemen has accomplished during the recent years in agriculture, fisheries resources and forestry, in spite of the country's limited land and water resources. The Prime Minister concluded by calling upon FAO and other concerned agencies, as partners in agricultural development, to support his country's efforts to reach the overall goals of sustainable agricultural development in Yemen.

Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur

9. His Excellency Dr. Galal Ibrahim Fakirah, Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation in the Republic of Yemen, was unanimously elected Chairperson of the Conference.

10. The Conference resolved that all other Heads of Delegations would be Vice-Chairpersons and appointed Mr. Abdalla Zaied (Libya), Head of the Near East Group of Permanent Representatives to FAO in Rome, as the Conference Rapporteur.

Adoption of the Agenda

11. The Conference adopted the Provisional Agenda NERC/06/1-Rev.2 (Appendix A) and the Timetable NERC/06/INF/2, after introducing some changes.

II. STATEMENTS

Statement by the Director-General

12. Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, decided to circulate his statement to the Conference (Appendix D) and opted to dedicate more time for providing the needed elaborations on the proposed FAO reforms and for the discussion of this important issue.

Matters Arising from the 33rd Session of the FAO Conference

13. Referring to the Document NERC/06/6, “Matters Arising from the 33rd Session of the FAO Conference” and to Document RC/2006/1 on “FAO Reform”, the Director-General provided the Conference with an extensive briefing about the substantive outcome of the 33rd Session of the FAO Conference, particularly in relation to the proposed FAO reforms.

14. The Director-General pointed out that an information note entitled: “*FAO Reform: A vision for the 21st century*” (C 2005/INF/19) was issued in order to apprise Members Countries further about why change was needed at this turning point in the life of the Organization. He explained that FAO had to take note of the changes that were taking place in the United Nations system and the strong demands, reiterated at the 2005 World Summit, to advance further in the reform process that had been under way for several years. He stressed that FAO could not just stand back and watch this process unfold.

15. The Director-General further noted that FAO’s working methods should reflect the findings of the in-depth survey on the role of FAO as an organization that gathers, analyses, processes, disseminates, transfers and applies knowledge. FAO had to take into account the outcome of a series of studies and evaluations, in particular the Independent Evaluation of FAO's Decentralization, which indicated that the decentralization process initiated in 1994 had still not produced the full benefits expected. FAO also needed to take into account the different recommendations made by the External Auditor and the Inspector-General to improve effectiveness and reduce costs.

16. The Director-General explained that, with a careful and thorough assessment of all these emerging challenges, he had proposed wide-ranging reforms that were aimed at strengthening the Organization so that it could deal with its challenges and better respond to Members’ needs. The main guiding principles underlying the proposed reforms were generally supported by the Conference and included: reinforcing the country focus, with selectivity in allocating FAO resources, while marshalling resources to support Members; focusing on capacity building; strengthening interdisciplinarity and policy assistance; working together with UN system partners; reinforcing alliances with civil society and peoples’ organizations; deepening cooperation with intergovernmental organizations; and improving management processes.

17. The proposed overhaul of the FAO offices in decentralized locations involved, among others, the establishment of 16 Subregional Offices (of which seven in new locations, with the remainder being covered by the existing Regional and Subregional Offices) composed of multidisciplinary teams and taking account of the membership of Regional and Subregional Economic Integration Organizations. For the Near East, the Director-General pointed out that this would involve the establishment of two Subregional Offices in new locations: one for

Central Asia and the second to serve the Member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). A third Subregional Office would be co-hosted by the Regional Office for the Near East in Cairo and would serve all other countries in the Region not covered by other Subregional Offices.

18. The Director-General indicated that the FAO Conference deliberated at length on the proposed reforms and the outcome of these deliberations was outlined in a *Resolution on Reforms in the Organization*. The Resolution authorized the progressive implementation of a first stage of the reform proposals related to the organizational structure at Headquarters. The Resolution acknowledged the need for strengthened decentralization and requested, as a first step, the implementation of proposals in one region and one additional subregional office.

19. As a follow-up to the Conference directives, the Director-General indicated that many of the changes to the headquarters organizational structure that were authorized by the Conference as a first stage of reform were implemented effective 1 January 2006. FAO was also proceeding with the implementation of the reform proposals related to the decentralization in one region and one additional subregional office. This would take place in the Africa region, while the additional subregional office would cover Central Asia. In doing so, the Director-General was addressing the practical implications: i.e. *inter alia* initiating a process of consultation with the member countries of the sub-regions concerned regarding the location of new offices on the basis of well-defined criteria, assessing the required staffing numbers and profiles leading to the eventual redeployment of staff or the establishment of new posts, ensuring that appropriate budgetary allocations are available to the concerned offices and establishing the parameters for agreements with host countries and provision of adequate premises.

20. The Director-General's briefing was followed by an extensive discussion as well as clarification questions regarding specific aspects of the reform proposals. The Conference **commended** the Director-General for initiating the wide-ranging reform proposals and expressed its **firm support** for their implementation.

21. The Conference expressed its satisfaction with the main thrusts of the reform proposals. In particular, Delegates commended the decentralization process and agreed with the Director-General's assessment that this process should help FAO to become more effective in delivering its technical assistance and advice to Member Countries. However, it was pointed out that an appropriate balance was needed between Headquarters, Regional Offices, Sub-regional Offices and Country Representations in order to enhance delivery and efficiency. The Conference stressed that the emphasis on strengthening Sub-regional Offices would not be at the expense of the Regional Offices. In response, it was emphasized that the sub-regional offices are part of the regional office.

22. The Conference expressed its hope that the reforms would result in greater cost-effectiveness in FAO's delivery of its programmes. In particular, Delegates commended the proposed increased reliance on nationally-recruited staff, keeping in mind that this would not result in lowering the recruitment standards. They were reassured by the Director-General that the UN Standards for recruitment would remain the same.

23. Regarding possible contradictions between the ‘Independent External Evaluation’ (IEE) and the reform proposals, which was raised by the head of the Kuwaiti Delegation, the Director General responded with the quotation of the Independent Chairman of the Council *“The Conference in particular stressed the mutually supportive role of the IEE and the reform proposals of the DG.”* He indicated that he could not comment on relations between the content of the existing reform proposal and the substance of an IEE report which will not be available before the FAO Conference in November 2007.

24. At the closure of the discussion on “Matters Arising from the 33rd Session of the FAO Conference”, the Conference re-iterated its **firm support** for the reform proposals and **commended** the Director-General for taking the initiative to provide detailed briefing to the Regional Conferences.

Report on FAO Activities in the Near East Region with a focus on the Achievement of the World Food Summit (WFS) Target and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

25. Mr. Mohamad Albraithen, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East, reviewed FAO’s main activities in the Region during the 2004-05 biennium. He started by pointing out that the focus of this review was the achievement of the World Food Summit (WFS) target and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), noting that this provided an opportunity for collective reflection on the progress achieved to date, especially given that the 2006 Regional Conference was taking place half way between the 1996 WFS and the target year of 2015.

26. Mr. Albraithen continued that, while all of FAO’s actions and programmes contributed, directly or indirectly, to these targets, the Organization had embarked on a number of global and regional initiatives over the past few years to address the problems of hunger and food insecurity. After reviewing the main highlights of these programmes, Mr. Albraithen went on to brief the Conference on actions taken in response to the main recommendations of the 27th Session of the FAO Near East Regional Conference.

27. The Conference noted with satisfaction the wide range and comprehensiveness of FAO activities in the Region during the 2004-05 biennium and **endorsed** FAO’s efforts to focus its activities on the achievement of the MDGs. However, the Conference recognized that further efforts were still needed particularly at the country level, where closer coordination with other United Nations agencies could enhance FAO’s contribution to help Member Countries move closer towards achieving the MDGs.

28. Several Delegates expressed their interest in FAO conducting a prospective study that would outline the expected long-term changes in the global economic environment and their anticipated impacts on agricultural development and food security in the Region. The Conference **requested** FAO to initiate preparatory actions to define the scope and terms of reference for such a study and to formulate a preliminary proposal for possible submission to interested donors, in consultation with development partners and Member Countries.

III. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND DEBATES

Report of the Senior Officers Meeting

29. The Senior Officers Meeting Report (NERC/06/SOM/REP Appendix E) was presented by the Rapporteur for consideration and adoption by the Conference. The Conference adopted the Report after introducing some amendments.

Discussion and Debate on a Pressing Issue in the Region: “Implications of the Recent Developments in the Global and Regional Trading Environment for Food Security and Agricultural Development in the Near East”

30. The Conference took note of the Document NERC/06/INF/5, “Discussion and Debate on a Pressing Issue in the Region: Implications of the Recent Developments in the Global and Regional Trading Environment for Food Security and Agricultural Development in the Near East”. The Conference commended FAO for holding this special session to allow informal discussion and exchange of experiences in relation to the WTO agricultural negotiations as well as other priority issues related to agricultural development and food security.

31. The Conference was briefed on the salient elements related to agriculture, which were covered by the Draft Ministerial Declaration at the end of the WTO meeting held in December 2005 in Hong Kong. These included agreements for substantial reductions in trade-distorting **domestic support**; elimination of all forms of **export subsidies** by the end of 2013; issues related to **market access**, **special and differential treatment**; and issues related to the special case of **cotton**.

32. The Conference recognized that much remained to be done in order to establish modalities and conclude the negotiations, but noted with satisfaction the agreement among WTO member countries to intensify work on all outstanding issues to fulfill the Doha Round objectives and reach a final agreement by the end of 2006.

33. In addition to issues related to the WTO trade negotiations, the Conference recalled that Near East countries had been parties to a large number of regional trade agreements (RTAs) such as the Pan-Arab Free Trade Area (PAFTA), the Economic Co-operation Organization (ECO), the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). All have the common objective of promoting intra-regional agricultural trade and cooperation within Member Countries. Moreover, it was noted that many countries in the Region had bilateral agreements with the European Union in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement. These Agreements are now entering a new phase, with focus on trade liberalization in the context of the recently launched European Neighborhood Policy (ENP).

34. The Conference expressed its concern that, despite all these regional and subregional trade agreements, the performance of intra-regional agricultural trade remained low. It was pointed out that there was a need to assess these RTAs, their interplay with trade reforms at the national and multilateral levels, the experience with their implementation and the major constraints hindering their efficacy.

35. The Conference **called upon** Member States to:

- continue strengthening the technical and institutional capacities of the units, within Ministries of Agriculture, responsible for agricultural policy analysis and trade-related issues to support the national team responsible for the WTO related negotiations, as well as to incorporate trade implications in the mainstream of agriculture;
- promote adequate measures to enhance agricultural investments and ensure financing of national agricultural development programmes;
- discuss with international and regional financing institutions the possibilities for supporting national, sub-regional and regional capacity building activities in areas related to multilateral trade negotiations, in collaboration with FAO

36. The Conference **requested** FAO to:

- consider providing capacity building support to Member Countries of the Region in multilateral trade negotiations and regional trade agreements, within available resources;
- assess, upon completion of ongoing WTO negotiations on modalities on agriculture, the potential impact of the Doha Round commitments on agricultural trade and food security in the Near East countries; and
- assist countries of the Region in facilitating exchange of information and lessons learned between WTO member countries and countries considering accession to the WTO, as well as between the Mediterranean countries, which have long experience of partnership with the EU, and other countries of the region.

General Debate and Recommendations

37. In addition to the debate on “Implications of the Recent Developments in the Global and Regional Trading Environment for Food Security and Agricultural Development in the Near East”, the Conference debated numerous issues related to other priorities of agricultural development and food security.

38. Due to the wealth of plant and animal genetic resources in the Region, the Conference **called upon** Member Countries to strengthen their national documentation, registration and exchange of information and expertise among existing Gene Banks in some countries of the Region.

39. The Conference expressed its deep concerns about the grave consequences facing Palestinian agriculture and **requested** FAO to move from providing emergency projects to more long-term projects for the rehabilitation and development of the sector.

40. The Conference **endorsed** the recommendation of the Senior Officers' Meeting to hold a regional coordination meeting to examine the situation of Avian Influenza in the Region. The Conference welcomed the invitation from Jordan for this meeting to be held in Amman.

41. The Conference took note of the recent serious drought affecting some parts of Somalia and threatening the food security and livelihoods of a large number of population. The Conference **requested** FAO to take immediate action to provide the necessary emergency assistance to the affected population.

IV. OTHER MATTERS

Proposed List of Topics to be Considered at the 29th Regional Conference for the Near East

42. The Conference formed a Committee, consisting of representatives of five Member States (Iran, Morocco, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen) plus a member of FAO Secretariat, to assist in collecting proposed topics by Member Countries and to prepare a list of topics for consideration by the Conference. The Conference reviewed the various topics compiled by the Committee and **requested** the Secretariat to submit the approved condensed list of topics (shown below) to FAO headquarters for consideration and possible inclusion in the Conference Agenda of the 29th FAO Regional Conference for the Near East:

- a) Strategic framework for sustainable agricultural development and food security in the Near East: programmes, emerging policy issues and future prospects.
- b) Agricultural investment in the Near East: current situation, constraints and future prospects.
- c) Recent developments in world trade environment and implications of sustainable agricultural development and food security in the region.
- d) Groundwater management and governance in the Near East: experience and lessons learned.
- e) Ensuring food safety in the Near East: challenges and opportunities.
- f) Aquaculture: a review of successful pilot experiences in some Near East countries.
- g) Strengthening and reform of National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems: Global trends and regional developments.
- h) Rangeland management, monitoring and evaluation for combating desertification and sustainable use of biodiversity.
- i) Socio-economic impacts of transboundary animal diseases in the Near East
- j) Post harvest losses in the Near East: challenges and food security implications.
- k) Integrated utilization of agricultural residues: contribution to small scale agro-industries and sustainable agricultural development in the region.
- l) Agricultural Knowledge and Information Management Systems in the Near East: Recent Experiences and Lessons Learned.

V. CONCLUDING ITEMS

Date and Place of the Twenty-ninth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

43. The Conference welcomed the invitation extended by the Governments of Egypt, Libya, Pakistan and Turkey to host the Twenty-ninth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. Other governments have indicated their interest to present their country as a host to NERC-29 as well. The Conference **requested** that the Director-General of FAO take all submissions into consideration when deciding on the date and place of the coming Conference, in consultation with Member Governments of the Region.

Adoption of the Report of the Regional Conference

44. The Conference adopted the Report of the 28th Regional Conference, including the Senior Officers Meeting Report, after introducing some amendments.

Closure of the Conference

45. On behalf of Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, Mr. Mohamad Albraithen, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East, expressed his deep gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Abdul Kader Bagammal and to the Government and people of Yemen for hosting the Conference and for the excellent facilities and arrangements, which had contributed to the success of the Conference.

46. His Excellency Dr. Abubaker Al-Mansouri, Secretary for the General People's Committee for Agriculture, Animal Wealth and Water Resources, Libya, spoke on behalf of the Delegates expressing thanks and appreciation to the Government and people of Yemen. He also commended the National Organizing Committee and the Conference Secretariat for the good preparation and smooth running of the Conference.

47. Following proposals from several Delegates, the Conference decided to send a cable of thanks to His Excellency Mr. Ali Abdullah Saleh, the President of the Republic of Yemen, for the generous hospitality afforded to all participants of the Conference. It was also decided to send a similar cable of thanks to His Excellency Mr. Abdul Kader Bagammal, the Prime Minister of Yemen. Moreover, the Conference also decided to send letters of thanks and appreciations to Their Excellencies the Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation and the Minister for Fisheries.

48. In his closing statement, His Excellency Dr. Galal Fakirah, Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation in the Republic of Yemen and Chairperson of the Conference, reiterated his deep gratitude to the Director-General of FAO, to the Regional Representative and to the Conference Secretariat for their efforts in making the Conference a success. He thanked Their Excellencies the Ministers and their accompanying senior officers, as well as Heads of Delegations for their valuable contributions and views related to the Region's main concerns during the Conference deliberations.

49. The Chairperson declared the Conference closed at 17:00 hours, on Thursday, 16 March 2006.

APPENDIX A

Revised Agenda **(A) SENIOR OFFICERS MEETING** **12-14 March 2006**

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

1. Opening of the Senior Officers Meeting
2. Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

II. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Controlling Trans-boundary Animal Diseases, with Special Reference to Avian Influenza
5. Adopting Drought Mitigation Strategies in the Near East Region
6. Fisheries in the Near East Region: Situation, Constraints and Prospects
7. Report of 4th Session of the Agriculture and Land and Water Use Commission (ALAWUC) for the Near East

III. OTHER MATTERS

8. Global and Regional Emergency Issues
9. Procedures for the Participation of Observers

IV. CONCLUDING ITEMS

10. Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting
11. Closure of the Senior Officers Meeting

(B) MINISTERIAL MEETING
15 - 16 March 2006

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

1. Inaugural Ceremony
2. Election of Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

II. STATEMENTS

4. Statement by the FAO Director-General
5. Matters Arising from the 33rd Session of the FAO Conference
6. Report on FAO Activities in the Region with a focus on the Achievement of the World Food Summit (WFS) Target and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

III. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND DEBATES

7. Report of the Senior Officers Meeting
8. Discussion and Debate on a Pressing Issue in the Region: “Implications of the Recent Developments in the Global and Regional Trading Environment for Food Security and Agricultural Development in the Near East”

IV. OTHER MATTERS

9. Proposed List of Topics to be Considered at the 29th Regional Conference

V. CONCLUDING ITEMS

10. Date and Place of the 29th Regional Conference for the Near East
11. Adoption of the Report of the Regional Conference (including the Senior Officers Meeting Report)
12. Closure of the Conference.

APPENDIX B

قائمة بأسماء المشاركين

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

هيئة مكتب المؤتمر

OFFICERS OF THE CONFERENCE

Chairperson:

الرئيس:

H.E. Galal Ibrahim FAKIRAH
Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation
Republic of Yemen

معالي الدكتور / جلال إبراهيم فقير
وزير الزراعة والري
الجمهورية اليمنية

Vice-Chairpersons:

نواب الرئيس:

All Heads of Delegations

جميع رؤساء الوفود

Rapporteur for the Senior Officers Meeting:

المقرر لاجتماع كبار المسؤولين:

Mamoun DAWELBEIT (Sudan)

مأمون ضو البيت (السودان)

Rapporteur for the Ministerial Meeting:

المقرر للاجتماع الوزاري:

Abdalla ZAIED (Libya)

عبد الله زايد (ليبيا)

الدول الأعضاء في الإقليم

MEMBER NATIONS OF THE REGION

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أفغانستان

ALGERIA

الجزائر

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BAHRAIN

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علي أحمد المقطوف
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العامة للاتصال الخارجي والتعاون الدولي
طرابلس

MALTA

مالطا

MAURITANIA

موريتانيا

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Ministry of Rural Development and Environment
Nouakchott

معالي السيد/ كانديكا سيلي
وزير التنمية الريفية والبيئة
وزارة التنمية الريفية والبيئة
نواكشوط

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موما ولد حما الله
مدير الزراعة
وزارة التنمية الريفية والبيئة
نواكشوط

MOROCCO

المغرب

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Rabat

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OMAN, SULTANATE OF

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APPENDIX C

Provisional List of Documents

Discussion Items

NERC/06/1	Provisional Annotated Agenda
NERC/06/2	Report on FAO Activities in the Region, with a Focus on the Achievement of the World Food Summit (WFS) Target and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
NERC/06/3	Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Controlling Trans-boundary Animal Diseases
NERC/06/3/Sup.1	Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Controlling Trans-boundary Animal Diseases: A Supplement on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza
NERC/06/4	Adopting Drought Mitigation Strategies in the Near East Region
NERC/06/5	Fisheries in the Near East Region: Situation, Constraints and Prospects
NERC/06/6	Matters arising from the Thirty-third Session of the FAO Conference
RC/2006/1	FAO Reform: Part I. The Director-General's revised proposals Part II. A vision for the twenty-first century

Information Items

NERC/06/INF/1	Information Note
NERC/06/INF/2	Provisional Timetable
NERC/06/INF/3	Provisional List of Documents
NERC/06/INF/4	Statement by the FAO Director-General
NERC/06/INF/5	Discussion and Debate on a Pre-selected Pressing Issue in the Region: "Implications of the Recent Developments in the Global and Regional Trading Environment for Food Security and Agricultural Development in the Near East"
NERC/06/INF/6	Good Agriculture Practices (GAP), Organic Farming and International Market Requirements
NERC/06/INF/7	Strengthening Rural Institutions: Alleviating Poverty to Meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
NERC/06/INF/8	Biotechnology Potential in Support of Rural Development: Pros and Cons
NERC/06/INF/9	The Role of IPM Policies in the Promotion of Crop Quality Improvement in the Near East Region
NERC/06/INF/10	Forests and Trees to Combat Desertification and Drought
NERC/06/INF/11	Farmers' Participation in the Management of Public Irrigation Schemes in the Near East: Experience and Prospects for Improvement

APPENDIX D

STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

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

(Introduction)

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the Twenty-eighth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East in this historic city of Sana'a. On behalf of the Organization and in the name of all of you, I should like to express our profound gratitude to His Excellency, President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and to his Government for their kind invitation, their warm welcome and their generous hospitality.

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

(State of food insecurity in the world and in the Near East region - based on the latest State of Food Insecurity in the World, SOFI)

In 1996, the World Food Summit invited the Heads of State and Government to eliminate hunger and achieve sustainable food security for all. This global commitment was reaffirmed by the Millennium Summit of 2000, the World Food Summit: *five years later* of 2002 and the United Nations Summit of September 2005.

Despite these commitments, there were 852 million undernourished people in the world in 2000-2002, including 815 million in the developing countries, 28 million in the countries in transition and 9 million in the industrialized countries. If this trend is to continue, only South America and the Caribbean will achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015. The goal of halving the number of people suffering from hunger will only be achieved in 2150.

In January 2006, there were 45 countries in the world facing serious food shortages, including 27 in Africa, 11 in Asia and the Near East, 6 in Latin America and 1 in Europe. The causes vary, but the main factors are adverse weather conditions and conflict.

According to the World Food Summit targets, the Near East region was to reduce its number of undernourished people from 73 million in 1990-1992 to 55 million in 2000-2002, then to 34 million in 2015.

Regrettably, the number of people suffering hunger and undernutrition has increased, from 73 million in 1990-1992 to approximately 100 million in 2000-2002. The proportion of undernourished people has risen from 13 to approximately 15 percent of the total population during the same period. Unless strong measures are taken to reverse this alarming trend, in

particular through massive investment in agriculture, the number of people suffering hunger in the region could reach 143 million by 2015.

(Agricultural development in the Near East in 2004-2005)

Agriculture, the mainstay of food security and rural development, is the principal activity in a majority of the countries of the region. It accounts for 13 percent of gross domestic product and 34 percent of employment.

(Results)

Agriculture is characterized by pronounced fluctuations caused by highly variable climatic conditions. In 2004, average agricultural production was 4.1 percent higher than in 2002 and 2003. For cereals, the region's staple food, production in 2004 and 2005 stood at an average of 170 million tonnes, which was 3.9 percent higher than the average for 2002 and 2003, and 22 percent higher than the average for the drought-affected 2000 and 2001 seasons. Similarly, the region posted a 4 percent growth in livestock production in 2004.

Fisheries production has remained stable in recent years, with total fish landings in the 32 countries of 4.4 million tonnes in 2003, up only 0.4 percent from 2002.

The forestry sector remained largely unchanged in most countries of the region in the period 1990-2005.

The Near East's significant agricultural trade deficit shows no sign of abating. Total agricultural imports in 2003 were valued at US\$ 31 billion, compared to 11 billion for the agricultural exports.

(Constraints)

The countries of the Near East continue to face internal and external constraints:

- The region has a high rate of population growth, averaging 3.1 percent in the 1980s and about 2.3 percent in the 1990s. The labour force continues to swell by more than 3 percent per year.
- The region has very little fertile agricultural land, which is rapidly degrading because of urban expansion, soil erosion, salinization and other factors.
- Water scarcity is the major challenge facing agriculture in virtually all the countries of the region. Serious drought affected plant and animal production in much of the region in the years 1998-2001. The semi-arid rangeland is deteriorating very quickly.
- The economies of the Near East are facing an external trading environment that has been made more difficult by globalization. Countries continue to export a limited range of high-value commodities. Many of these countries, however, have the necessary potential to increase their exports of agricultural commodities. For this, they will have to adjust their legislative and regulatory systems and to strengthen their institutional capacity to adapt to international standards.

(Emergencies)

Several countries of the Near East face serious food shortages that are largely attributable to internal conflicts, unfavourable weather conditions and earthquakes. Such is the case in **Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Sudan**.

Some countries have also had to deal with an invasion of desert locusts.

(Issues on the agenda of the Regional Conference)

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On the basis of the recommendations made at your last conference in Doha, this conference will be examining the management of natural resources, recent developments in world trade policy, transboundary animal diseases and the necessary FAO reforms.

Your agenda will enable you to discuss:

- *the report on FAO activities in the region;*
- *the strengthening of regional cooperation in controlling transboundary animal diseases;*
- *strategies for mitigating the effects of drought in the region;*
- *the fisheries situation, constraints and prospects;*
- *the implications of global and regional trade on food security and agricultural development.*

(Main challenges and prospects for the future)

The document *A vision for the twenty-first century* explains the necessary reforms proposed at this turning point in the life of the Organization. The intention is to go beyond the preliminary decisions of the conference and to achieve coherent reform in the different regions of the world, so that FAO is better able to respond to the needs of its Member Nations, to the transformation taking place in the United Nations system and to the changing international environment.

(Future prospects)

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Many countries of the region are experiencing a boom driven by rising oil prices, which has generated substantial public and private revenue and cash resources for investment in economic growth and agriculture in particular. GDP is expected to grow by an average of 5.1 percent in 2006, the same as in 2005.

Higher consumer incomes could create additional demand for food products which could be met by higher agricultural production in the region.

Your Regional Conference will have to look into these challenges. For its part, FAO will continue to support governments and regional partners in the formulation and implementation of coherent and effective programmes to ensure sustainable rural and agricultural development – the basis of food security in the region. I therefore await the outcome of your deliberations with great interest and wish you every success in your work.

Thank you.

APPENDIX E

**NERC/06/SOM/REP
March 2006**

**TWENTY-EIGHTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE
FOR THE NEAR EAST**

**REPORT OF THE
SENIOR OFFICERS MEETING**

Sana'a, Republic of Yemen, 12-14 March 2006

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Regional Office for the Near East**

Cairo 2006

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Organization of the Meeting

1. The Senior Officers Meeting of the Twenty-eighth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East was held from 12 to 14 March 2006 in Sana'a, the Republic of Yemen.

Inaugural Ceremony

2. The Meeting was inaugurated by His Excellency Dr. Galal Fakirah, Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation in the Republic of Yemen, and was also addressed by Mr. Mohamad Albraithen, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East. In attendance, there were 115 delegates from 22 countries and 20 observers. The Meeting was also attended by several host country senior officers, representatives of UN and other International and Regional Organizations and representatives from the news media. The list of participants is given in Appendix B.

3. Mr. Albraithen, in his Opening Statement, expressed his thanks and appreciation for the people and Government of Yemen for their warm welcome and hospitality. He pointed out that this was the second time that the Regional Conference is held in Yemen, twenty-two years after the 17th Session of the Conference held in Aden in 1984. Mr. Albraithen thanked H.E. the Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation for his participation in the inauguration of the Meeting and for all the efforts exerted by the Ministry and the National Organizing Committee, as well as the excellent arrangements and facilities provided for the success of the Meeting. He also thanked the senior officers and representatives of Member Countries and International and Regional Organizations for their attendance.

4. Mr. Albraithen stressed the role of the Senior Officers Meeting as an integral part of the Regional Conference and as a preparatory forum for an in-depth discussion of technical issues of concern to the Near East. He reviewed the Agenda of the Meeting and expressed his hope that the Meeting would reach positive and concrete recommendations for adoption by the Ministerial Meeting.

5. His Excellency Dr. Fakirah expressed his sincere thanks to FAO and its Regional Office for the Near East for convening the FAO Regional Conference in Yemen. He stressed the importance of sustainable agricultural development and the need for a common vision and closer coordination among countries of the Region. He also pointed out that all the items on the Agenda of the Conference would require closer regional cooperation.

6. The Minister highlighted FAO's continued leading role in providing assistance to Member Countries to move towards more sustainable agricultural development. He commended FAO for initiating a process of widespread reforms to ensure that the Organization would continue to support Member Countries in a transparent, efficient and cost-effective way. The Minister concluded by expressing his high expectations from the Senior Officers Meeting to provide the appropriate recommendations to the Ministerial Meeting.

7. Following the Inaugural Ceremony, Mr. Noori Naeini, the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, delivered a short statement to the Meeting. He informed the Meeting

that during a recent meeting with the Group of Seventy-seven (G77) and with the Near East Group of Permanent Representatives to FAO, they requested that he convey to the Meeting some specific points not covered by the agenda. Mr. Naeini appealed to Member Countries to settle their arrears in payments, which would contribute to alleviate FAO's financial situation. He pointed to the Director-General's reforms proposal and asked for its careful consideration and support. Although the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) was initially funded by high-income countries, including some countries from the Region, Mr. Naeini called upon all Member Countries of the Region, especially higher-income countries, to contribute funding to cover the remaining costs of the IEE. Finally, Mr. Naeini reminded the Meeting about FAO's success in developing guidelines on the Right-to-Food and called upon member countries to ensure adequate support and follow-up on this issue.

Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur

8. The Meeting unanimously elected H.E. Mr. Abdul Malik Al Arashi, the Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation in Yemen, as its Chairperson and resolved that all other Heads of Delegations for the Senior Officers Meeting would be Vice-Chairpersons. Mr. Mamoun Dawelbeit (Sudan) was appointed Rapporteur.

Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

9. The Provisional Annotated Agenda (NERC/06/1-Rev.1) and Timetable (NERC/06/INF/2-Rev.2) were adopted.

II. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Controlling Transboundary Animal Diseases, with Special Reference to Avian Influenza

10. The Meeting considered Document NERC/06/3, "*Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Controlling Transboundary Animal Diseases, with Special Reference to Avian Influenza*" and deliberated at length on various issues related to transboundary animal diseases (TADs), particularly Avian Influenza.

11. The Meeting welcomed with appreciation the joint initiative taken by FAO and OIE to establish the Global Framework for Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs). This initiative focuses on strengthening veterinary services and national capacity through North-South and South-South partnerships. It also aims at establishing networks that link information sharing with joint actions for prevention, early warning and early response activities for control or even eradication of the disease. The Meeting recognized that increased cooperation at the global and regional levels was required to enhance technical support for the prevention and control of transboundary animal diseases in the Near East Region.

12. The Meeting took note of the FAO/OIE proposal to set up three GF-TADs Regional Support Units (RSUs), with the Regional Secretariat located in Beirut, Lebanon, acting as regional facilitator and convener. These RSUs would be established within FAO's Regional and Sub-regional Offices, including existing and planned offices, in addition to OIE's

regional office in Lebanon. The actual location, structure and functions of these RSUs will be discussed during the first regional GF-TAD meeting to be held in Beirut 6-7 April 2006.

13. The Meeting took note of the recent developments related to the *Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme* (GREP), which aims at eliminating the disease from the world by the year 2010., The Meeting shared FAO's continued concern over the slow progress of the accreditation process in the Region. It was noted that most countries in the Near East had now ceased rinderpest vaccination and several had entered onto the internationally recognized "OIE Pathway" for verification of Rinderpest freedom by issuing a *Declaration of Provisional Freedom from Rinderpest*. However, without a formal mechanism for coordination and technical guidance through constant interaction with the FAO GREP Secretariat, accreditation was unlikely to be achieved by the GREP deadline of 2010.

14. The Meeting took note of the proposal for a Phase II funding for the Regional Animal Disease Surveillance and Control Network (RADISCON). The objectives of Phase I (1997-2002) were to provide training in animal health data management and analysis, to promote passive and active surveillance for transboundary animal diseases and to promote quality outbreak investigation and risk analysis. The principal aim in Phase II is to assist the participating 21 countries of North Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Near East in using modern epidemiological approaches in their disease control strategies and in incorporating aspects of public health that were not included in Phase I. It was noted that the required funding would be about US\$4.8 million over a five-year period.

15. The Meeting noted with appreciation that FAO had implemented a US\$10.5 million project for the restoration and strengthening of essential veterinary services in Iraq to protect livestock from epidemic and endemic diseases and reduce public health risks. The project, funded by the UN Development Group Iraq Trust Fund for two years (2004-2006), was implemented in collaboration with the Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture, through the FAO-Iraq Office relocated in Amman, Jordan.

16. The Meeting examined the rapidly evolving situation regarding the ***Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) virus strain H5N1*** and expressed its deep concerns about the very serious threat presented by the virus particularly in the wake of recent outbreaks in several countries of the Near East. The Meeting agreed with the approach recommended by FAO and OIE, which considers that the most effective way to prevent a pandemic is to control outbreaks of bird flu at source in the poultry farms and to carry out prevention actions.

17. The Meeting noted with satisfaction that, in the wake of the Avian Influenza outbreaks in Asia, FAO was quick in its emergency response by providing funding to national and regional projects to assist countries in facing the disease or its prevention. FAO helped in attracting additional funds from various donors, including Near East Member Countries such as Saudi Arabia, for the purpose of disease containment and in establishing networks between veterinary epidemiological units and laboratories, and inter-facing with WHO and other specialized organizations.

18. The Meeting commended FAO for the formulation of a "*Global Programme for Avian Influenza Control and Eradication*" that was presented at a donors' pledging conference in Beijing in January 2006. FAO was also commended for the approval in

November 2005 of two regional TCP projects on “*Emergency Assistance for Early Detection and Prevention of Avian Influenza*”; one project covering countries in North Africa and the other for countries in the Middle East. The two projects would focus on disease prevention and public awareness, wild bird surveillance, and contingency planning through regional networks.

19. The Meeting welcomed the ongoing efforts of Kuwait to establish an animal disease laboratory and their plans to ensure that it would acquire accreditation as a Reference Laboratory in collaboration with the OIE.

20. The Meeting **called upon** Member States of the Region to:

- continue cooperation with the OIE to ensure that recently established and/or upgraded veterinary laboratories in some countries of the Region would be certified as regional Reference Laboratories and that all countries of the Region would benefit from the services of these Reference Laboratories;
- formulate and adopt comprehensive national emergency preparedness plans for dealing with possible incursions of Avian Influenza in non-infected countries, and, in infected countries, ensure effective and diligent implementation of these plans to control and ultimately eradicate the disease; and
- cooperate with FAO, OIE and other concerned international and regional agencies, as well as with other countries in the Region in generating and sharing Avian Influenza disease intelligence and experience in the prevention and control of the disease.

21. The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- collaborate closely with the OIE and other concerned regional organizations such as AOAD, ACSAD, ICARDA, etc. in the implementation of regional activities of the Global Framework for Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs);
- ensure that GF-TAD activities in the Region give adequate support to capacity building of technical staff and upgrading of laboratories and equipment;
- provide, upon request and within available resources, technical support and advice to raise the capacity of animal health laboratories in the Region;
- coordinate the fund-raising efforts among Member Countries and possible regional and international donors to ensure the necessary funding for launching a Phase II for the Regional Animal Disease Surveillance and Control Network (RADISCON);
- continue providing support, within available resources, to countries who need rehabilitation of their agricultural sectors and veterinary services following wars and natural disasters, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia and Sudan, including training in animal health and monitoring of veterinary drugs and vaccines;

- coordinate and manage, in collaboration with OIE and other concerned international and regional agencies, the effort in assisting countries of the Region to control and ultimately eradicate Avian Influenza from the poultry producing sectors and to prepare non-infected countries for a rapid detection of, and response to, incursions of the disease; and
- organize a coordination meeting on Avian Influenza for all countries of the Region, in collaboration with OIE, WHO and other concerned organizations, to exchange information and to closely coordinate efforts for early warning, detection and control of the disease. The Meeting welcomed Jordan's kind invitation for this coordination meeting to be held in Amman, Jordan.

Adopting Drought Mitigation Strategies in the Near East Region

22. The Meeting considered Document NERC/06/4, "*Adopting Drought Mitigation Strategies in the Near East Region*". The drought that swept over much of the Region during 1998-2000, considered by many Member Countries as the worst in 30 years, had raised awareness of the need to develop national preparedness plans for drought mitigation. As a result, both the 26th Regional Conference in 2002 and the 3rd Regional Agriculture and Land and Water Use Commission (ALAWUC) in 2004, have recommended FAO to provide technical assistance to enhance the capacity of Member Countries to formulate drought mitigation and preparedness plans. The Meeting commended FAO for addressing this very important topic.

23. The Meeting noted that the 1998-2000 drought had strong negative impacts on the agricultural sectors and the overall national economies of affected countries. These impacts occurred in varying degrees depending on the magnitude and duration of the drought, the nature and mix of farming systems, and on the country's level of preparedness and resilience of the affected communities. It was also noted that the adverse effects of drought included reduced agricultural productivity, environmental and natural resource degradation and human and socio-economic hardships.

24. The Meeting recognized that plans for drought mitigation have to be formulated and managed in a multidisciplinary approach and with a high degree of coordination. Both national short-term emergency response activities and long-term programmes to increase community resilience have to be studied, evaluated and integrated into each country's national development plan. It was also recognized that the legal framework for drought mitigation and response management need to be stipulated clearly and the responsibility for declaring the "state of drought" in a country, or in parts of it, would need to be assigned to a qualified governmental institution for follow up on implementation of the drought mitigation measures.

25. The Meeting recalled that countries in the Near East Region fall mostly within the arid and semi-arid zones. It was pointed out that water-saving and harvesting techniques were deeply rooted in the Region's tradition, with many examples of traditional technologies that would warrant further adaptation and improvement such as the *canat* networks in Iran and northern Egypt, *aflaj* irrigation systems in Oman and Saudi Arabia, and small check dams and terraces in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and the Maghreb countries. The Meeting

recognized that FAO, through technical assistance to Member Countries, could help national efforts to evaluate, screen, upgrade and improve these indigenous technologies.

26. The Meeting noted with satisfaction that many Member Countries have already taken steps to set up drought mitigation systems. The Meeting commended FAO for providing technical support and/or advice for most of these national initiatives.

27. In addition to all national efforts, the Meeting recognized that a regional approach to drought was imperative due to its transboundary nature and its widespread social and economic impact. The Meeting commended FAO for formulating a regional TCP project to address the regional dimension of drought covering the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Morocco and Syria with a focus on vulnerability and response assessment methodologies, training, sharing and harmonization of information and climate data, regional early warning information units, etc.

28. The Meeting recognized that the Drought Information Network for the Near East, Western Asia and North Africa (co-sponsored by FAO, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas –ICARDA- and the International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies – CIHEAM) could prove to be effective in sponsoring regional collaboration and dissemination of drought-related data. It was further recognized that the International Drought Mitigation Network (in Nebraska, USA) and the UN International Secretariat for Disaster Reduction (in Geneva) were also involved in providing information and promoting drought mitigation efforts. The Meeting noted with satisfaction that the FAO Regional Office for the Near East maintained contact and collaborated with these international efforts, keeping the Near East within the global sphere of concern on drought issues and assuring complementarity of information and resources.

29. The Meeting stressed the increasing importance of non-conventional water resources as an integral part of drought mitigation measures. It noted with satisfaction Kuwait's steps to establish an international center on wastewater research and utilization, in collaboration with FAO.

30. The Meeting **called upon** Member States of the Region to:

- enact legislation and policies for establishing relevant national enabling mechanisms for drought mitigation preparedness strategies;
- ensure that drought mitigation preparedness strategies are in harmony with national strategies for combating desertification under the United Nations Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD);
- create the required institutional set-up for planning, implementing, coordinating and monitoring the national programmes for drought mitigation;
- consider the establishment, within available resources, of a drought watch and early warning system to assure timely alerts and preparedness at country level;
- establish adequate liaison with regional and international organizations for following up on drought mitigation activities at national, regional and global levels;

- accord due attention to the socio-economic dimension of drought, within the framework of comprehensive and integrated preparedness and mitigation plans, and address rehabilitation and development, including water resources, rangeland, livestock, forestry and crop production;
- focus on the water demand management approach and consider efficiency of water use as the basis for drought mitigation;
- increase investment in agricultural research to improve water use efficiency and crop production under water shortage conditions, and to develop drought and salt tolerant varieties as well as exploring the feasibility of cloud-seeding; and
- support the recently established Regional Network on Drought Management for the Near East and North Africa and promote regional cooperation and exchange of experiences among Member Countries.

31. The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- provide policy advice and technical assistance to Member Countries, upon request and within available resources, in formulating and developing national long-term action plans for drought mitigation;
- collaborate with concerned Member Countries in developing indicators for the appropriate timing to trigger disbursements against established drought relief provisions in government budgets;
- assist Member Countries in identifying potential international and regional donor agencies interested in funding drought mitigation activities, and provide technical support in the formulation of related regional, sub-regional and national projects for submission to donors' funding;
- conduct a study to assess recent experiences in the utilization of cloud seeding as a potential tool for drought mitigation and lessons learned from Near East countries; and
- encourage collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and other concerned organizations and Member Countries, particularly in relation to climatic studies and drought forecasting, and to benefit from their technical capacity in planning and implementing capacity building activities in Member Countries.

Fisheries in the Near East Region: Situation, Constraints and Prospects

32. The Meeting reviewed Document NERC/06/5, *"Fisheries in the Near East Region: Situation, Constraints and Prospects"*. It was noted that the main fishing areas of the region are the coastal and territorial waters and economic exclusive zones (EEZs) of the 32 member countries. The combined length of the Member Countries' coastlines stretches some 35 000 km and the continental shelf area, which constitutes most of the Region's fishing grounds, totals 1.29 million km². The inland fisheries areas of the Region include major rivers such as

the Nile, Euphrates, Tigris and Indus, plus various other small rivers and tributaries, irrigation canals and dams. Natural and artificial lakes, reservoirs and inland bodies of water can also be found in most countries of the Region.

33. The Meeting noted that the Near East Region's fisheries production from all sources reached 4.4 million tons or about 3.3 percent of the total world production. Capture fisheries (marine and freshwater) accounted for about 84.8 percent of total landings (with the remainder coming from aquaculture). In 2003, the five top fish producing countries in the Region from capture sources were Morocco (885 000 tonnes), Pakistan (565 000 tonnes), Turkey (508 000 tonnes), Egypt (431 000 tonnes) and Iran (349 000 tonnes). It was also noted that aquaculture production in the Region was led by Egypt accounting for 67 percent (445 000 tonnes) of the Region's production. Brackish water culture represented about 61 percent of the Region's total production from aquaculture (compared to 31 percent from freshwater culture and 8 percent from mariculture).

34. The Meeting noted that average annual per capita fish consumption in the Region was only 6.63 kg in 2003, compared to a world average of 16.3 kg. However, it was noted that these regional averages conceal wide variations not only between countries but also within each country. The preference throughout the Near East Region is generally for fresh fish. However, in recent years, chilled and frozen fish have become widely accepted in most countries.

35. Regarding constraints and development prospects, the Meeting agreed with FAO's assessment that marine capture fisheries were not expected to increase except for countries able to extend their fishing operations in their EEZs in order to increase future supply. Some countries may, with their own capabilities or through foreign assistance, engage in distant water fishing in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans accessible to countries such as Mauritania, Morocco, Yemen, Somalia, Oman, Iran and Pakistan.

36. The Meeting recognized that specific actions would need to be carried out by the majority of Member States if they were to improve the situation of their fisheries, meet the growing demand for fish products, satisfy environmental demands and ensure that fisheries meet their socio-economic potential. These actions could include reducing over-fishing by taking drastic measures in reducing fishing capacity; rebuilding and enhancing fish stocks through better management and resource conservation; minimizing wasteful fisheries practices, discards and post-harvest losses; and developing fisheries for new and alternate species based on principles of scientific sustainability and responsible management.

37. As for aquaculture, the Meeting noted that, due to uncertain potential for increasing fish supply from capture fisheries, the future supply of fish in the Near East Region would most likely depend on aquaculture. However, the Meeting recognized that there were environmental, technical, economic and legal constraints of varying degrees that would need to be overcome if aquaculture was to develop further. The Meeting agreed with FAO's assessment that governments and the private sector ought to look for ways and means to expand aquaculture production, which would require intense study as well as proper management aimed at increasing productivity per unit area, diversifying and introducing new species and, at the same time, increasing the culture of high-value species that are more lucrative in local and export markets.

38. The Meeting **called upon** Member States of the Region to:

- establish proper databases for all aspects of the fish industry;
- reduce the number of fishing vessels so as to increase catch per boat and lower unit costs;
- conduct proper and comprehensive stock assessment surveys for marine and inland fishing areas at the national or regional levels;
- formulate, implement and enforce laws and regulations to monitor and regulate fishing efforts, including registration of vessels and fishermen and record-keeping of fishing activities;
- ensure regional cooperation and sharing of information among Member Countries in dealing with the issues of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing;
- take corrective measures to protect fisheries from environmental degradation emanating from tourism, agriculture, industry, sewage and other polluting activities;
- conduct multi-species re-stocking programmes and construct adequate landing facilities equipped with better and more appropriate services and processing plants as well as marketing and logistical information;
- encourage the private sector to increase aquaculture activities through provision of economic and administrative incentives;
- promote studies and research aimed at increasing productivity per unit area, diversifying and introducing new species, especially those of high value, and identifying the most sustainable and practical farming options;
- process fish into value-added products that meet international quality and safety standards, including *Codex Alimentarius*, in order to have better access to lucrative exports markets in the context of global trade liberalization;
- take proper action to improve intra-regional and inter-regional trade through improving transport and storage infrastructure, improving handling practices and distribution networks, and ensuring harmonization and proper enforcement of fish trade regulations;
- improve access to regional fish marketing information services such as Info Samak, Info Fish, Info Pêche and Euro-Fish; and
- encourage the establishment of national, sub-regional and regional networking, and support and coordinate with other regional bodies like Info Samak, the Arab Fish Federation, the Arab Organization for Agriculture Development and the Agricultural and Food Marketing Association for the Near East and North Africa (AFMANENA).

39. The Meeting **requested** FAO to:

- provide support and technical advice for conducting stock assessment surveys and preparing fishing and aquaculture databases;
- provide support for institutional capacity building in fisheries protection and the implementation of the *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries*;
- assist countries to benefit from the Fish Marketing Information Services and establish national networks;
- encourage research and provide technical advice and assistance to Member Countries to help them overcome pollution and diseases problems associated with aquaculture, including mariculture, through the adoption of good management practices, in collaboration with OIE, UNEP and other specialized organizations;
- provide Member Countries with technical and legal advice to assist them in dealing with the issues of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing;
- further strengthen collaboration among Member Countries of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) in its areas of competence and encourage the provision of assistance to Iraq in rebuilding and rehabilitating its fisheries institutions and infrastructure;
- collaborate with Member Countries and concerned regional and international organizations to assist Somalia to protect its fisheries resources from the extensive illegal fishing activities and to provide the needed technical assistance and advice to help the country to better protect its rich fisheries resources;
- facilitate the sharing of information on successful experiences in aquaculture among the countries of the Region, with particular emphasis on Egypt's pioneering experience in this field;
- coordinate with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) to ensure a speedy approval of IDB funding for the regional project on Red Sea Fisheries to complement the funding already received from other donors; and
- ensure that, within the ongoing reforms at FAO, Member Countries with an important fisheries sector, would, resource permitting, have adequate technical support from FAO, including support from the Fisheries Department at FAO Headquarters as well as from the fisheries experts based in the Regional and Sub-regional offices.

Report of the 4th Session of the Agriculture, Land and Water Use Commission (ALAWUC) for the Near East

40. The Meeting reviewed the Report of 4th Session the Agriculture, Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East (ALAWUC), which met from 7 to 9 March 2006 in Sana'a, Republic of Yemen. Following thorough examination and discussion, the Meeting **adopted** the Report, after introducing some amendments.

III. OTHER MATTERS

Global and Regional Emergency Issues

41. The Meeting considered a recommendation by FAO senior management that a standing item on "*Global and Regional Emergency Issues*" be introduced on the agenda of future FAO Regional Conferences. This item would address issues relating to emergencies and their impact at the global, regional and national levels and FAO's role in dealing with such issues in support of Member Countries. The Meeting noted that the Near East Region was frequently exposed to natural disasters such as droughts, earthquakes, floods, epidemics, etc., as well as man-made disasters such as wars and armed conflicts. Given the importance of alleviating the serious negative effects of such disasters on the local populations, the Meeting **endorsed** the above-mentioned recommendation.

Information Notes

42. The Meeting noted that past reports of the Senior Officers' Meeting included short summaries from the technical Information Notes. Given that these Notes are distributed but not discussed by the Meeting, the Meeting **recommended** that the Report should only provide a list of these documents without further elaborations.

43. The Meeting took note of the technical Information Notes prepared for this session of the Regional Conference, which covered priority topics for the Region as identified in previous sessions. The following six Information Notes were included:

1. "Good Agriculture Practices (GAP), Organic Farming and International Market Requirements" (NERC/06/INF/6)
2. "Strengthening Rural Institutions: *Alleviating Poverty to Meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*" (NERC/06/INF/7)
3. "Biotechnology Potential in Support of Rural Development: *Pros and Cons*". (NERC/06/INF/8)
4. "The Role of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Policies in the Promotion of Crop Quality Improvement in the Near East Region" (NERC/06/INF/9)
5. "Forests and Trees to Combat Desertification and Drought" (NERC/06/INF/10)
6. "Farmers' Participation in the Management of Public Irrigation Schemes in the Near East: *Experience and Prospects for Improvement*" (NERC/06/INF/11)

Procedures for the Participation of Observers

44. It was pointed out that Observers in the Meeting were not always familiar with the procedures governing their participation in the discussions and debates of the Meeting. The Meeting **recommended** that, in future sessions of the Regional Conference, the Secretariat should prepare a short note outlining the above-mentioned procedures, to be circulated to all participants.

IV. CONCLUDING ITEMS

Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting

45. The Meeting **adopted** the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting following a thorough review and after introducing several amendments.

Closure of the Senior Officers Meeting

46. Dr. Sultan Al-Khalaf (Kuwait) spoke on behalf of the delegates expressing thanks and appreciation to the Government and people of Yemen for hosting this Meeting. He commended the National Organizing Committee and the Conference Secretariat for the good preparation and smooth running of the Meeting.

47. Mr. Abdallah Al-Zayed, Head of the Near East Group of Permanent Representatives to FAO in Rome, addressed the Meeting and commended the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation and the FAO Regional Office for the excellent preparations for the Meeting. In particular, Mr. Al-Zayed expressed his great satisfaction with the use of the Arabic language in most of the presentations and discussions.

48. The Chairperson, H.E. Mr. Abdul Malik Al Arashi, the Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation, declared the Meeting closed at 17:00 hours, on Tuesday, 14 March 2006.