

UN Food System Summit: Pre-Summit Statement - MALDIVES

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UN Secretary-General António Guterres,

Distinguished Delegates.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Evening

On behalf of the Government of Maldives, it is an honor to join the pre-summit dialogues ahead of the very important UN Food System Summit scheduled for later this year. Today I am honored to briefly report the outcomes of the national dialogues carried out in the Maldives. With the guidance from the UN country team, especially from FAO Representation, Maldives have so far conducted four (4) “Food Summit Dialogues” among different stakeholder groups. I am greatly appreciative of the enthusiastic participation and the wide range of views shared by a diverse group of Maldivians who has a keen interest to improve the national Food System.

Honorable Chair,

As a small island state, Maldives is vulnerable in many frontiers as it strives to progress towards achieving the UN sustainable development goals by 2030 which is extremely crucial to the Maldives.

Like many countries in the world, Maldives is still in the midst of battling the challenges that has ravaged the country from the COVID - 19 pandemic. Maldives being a country with limited resources, the only fallback economic support is the fisheries and agriculture sector. It is not only the backbone of our economy, but also both sectors play a vital role in sustaining the food and livelihood of our communities.

Being a country that imports majority of the food supplies, during the past year we have come to realize more than ever the status of food security in the country and how fisheries and agriculture needs to play a key role in mitigating these problems.

As evidently documented in several academia and related literatures, the minimal arable land we own is degrading, our water resources including the oceans are getting contaminated, and our air is becoming polluted. Unfortunately, is not due to the actions of the inhabitants of the Maldives alone but due to the collective negligence of all the inhabitants of the Planet Earth. The truth is as a small island state, Maldives have a higher price pay, to sustain our existence on this planet.

Honorable Chair, increasing our dependence on high priced imported food is an inequality that we do not want to experience. It is critical that we get the necessary support to invest into sustainable, regenerative food production, distribution, and consumption patterns. In this regard, I cannot emphasize the significant task of the action track 1 theme of the 'UN Food System Summit' agenda, ensuring access to safe and nutritious food for all. We must modernize production, maximize profitability at the same time improve the role of food sectors responsibilities to the environment. We must find alternative ways to increase awareness on urban gardening, school gardening and community gardening as well as sustainable fisheries and mariculture. We must invest in alternative energy sources for value addition especially fish processing, food distribution and reduce the cost of food and its carbon footprint. During the public forums we discussed ways of establishing secure mechanisms to ensure imported foods are sourced from healthy food production systems. It is important to ensure that we are not in the receiving end of junk and unhealthy food pyramid instead we must enhance incentivizing locally grown food products.

Moving on to action track 2: shift to sustainable consumption patterns. This was a widely deliberated topic during the public forums. Food types, food demand and food waste were noted as areas for significant improvement. Moving towards traditional crops, the need to reduce demand for food by combating over-consumption and higher disease burden, environmental damage as well as reducing food waste especially at retail and household level was agreed as the way forward.

In the area of boosting nature-positive production for action track 3; education and awareness were an important theme. Reducing loss of biodiversity by encouraging appropriate land/water use plans, allocating areas for conservation in cropping, fisheries and mariculture systems is necessary to make the most efficient use of environmental resources in food system. Increasing efficient measures of water harvesting during the

monsoons and conserving ground water aquifer of the small islands and increasing investments into agro-forestry are important concepts in national food and agriculture policy.

Honorable Chair,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Action track 4: The advance equitable livelihood is important more than ever to small island countries like Maldives where livelihood opportunities are minimal, and the negative impacts of global shocks are higher. We don't have to go any further as we are currently experiencing these impacts with the COVID19 pandemic. Our country's food import bills rose significantly as price of food increased tremendously in the international market. Creating enabling environment through space and knowledge platforms for innovative value chains is important to drive this policy forward. We must stress that quality education in food production techniques and profitable businesses by creating avenues for financial opportunities and ICT, engaging women and other minority groups in food systems must be given priority. Furthermore, it is equally important that holistic food system education is taught at schools so that the food system value chain businesses are not look down upon by the young generation. Young food ambassadors representing educational establishment must be included in the policy making dialogues to make a difference in the future of our food systems.

Action track 5: Building resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress is intertwined with all action tracks. Addressing shocks of national events of climate change, regional events such as Asian Tsunami, global pandemics such as COVID19 has all been devastating experience in the Maldives. Climate proofing food systems by investing into climate smart precession agriculture, insurance and compensation programs for fisherman and farmers are important and integral way forward to address this action track.

Honorable Chair,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

We have seen all countries are ambitious and passionate to build a better and resilient food system in every country. But the reality is we cannot do it alone. This must be a global effort and the more privileged has a more significant and demanding responsibility to make the world a more equitable place for all. I am thankful that the UN as the global ambassador is working towards this goal through its 2030 sustainable development agenda.

Before I conclude may I wish the deliberation on the Food Summit at individual country level, this pre-summit and the main summit later this year every success and I pray with our collective efforts we can all build a sustainable pathway to regenerate the food systems of the world leading to a better future for us all.

Thank You.
