

# **Food Systems Stocktaking Moment 2023**

*Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Arab Region*  
Beirut, 13 March 2023

ESCWA OPENING STATEMENT

*Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Good morning.

On behalf of Dr. Rola Dashti, it gives me a great pleasure to welcome you to the UN House.

Today's stocktaking meeting is an opportunity to exchange on progress towards transforming food systems in the Arab region and the ways in which this transformation supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

This is a particular challenge for many countries and communities across the Arab region where ensuring access to healthy food for all remains a major challenge.

Financial insecurity, inflation, import dependency, disconnected food chains and storage, natural disasters and conflict render one-third of people in the region food insecure.

In tandem, healthy diets and nutrition remains elusive, where another third of the population is obese. Food insecurity and inequality span across social and economic groups.

However, it is the most vulnerable that need our support.

12% of the Arab population, or 53 million people, suffer from undernourishment.

The LDC5 Summit convened in Doha earlier this month highlighted the importance of strengthening the resilience of food systems in rural and urban communities to mitigate risks.

Conflict and uncertainty complicate matters further, leaving food aid and assistance a lifeline for so many - - - with thanks extended to some of the members of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub for the vital assistance they provide to these communities in need.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Transforming food systems can help the Arab region to strengthen resilience to shocks and achieve food security at a time of compounded crises. This requires:

1. **Fostering** equitable and inclusive food systems that provide the quantity and quality of food needed for all, while acknowledging the importance of agriculture and trade for sustaining livelihoods.
2. **Investing** in sustainability and climate-resilient production that is efficient, targeted and works with nature to avoid natural resource depletion and biodiversity loss.
3. **Creating** opportunities for regional cooperation and collaboration that can mitigate risks through early warning systems, common knowledge platforms, and access to the data that informs decisions from farm to fork.

ESCWA is committed to enhancing regional food security through well-functioning food systems. This is pursued through five pillars of work:

- First – **Coordination** across the water and agricultural sectors to strengthen coherence on food system policies. This has been institutionalized through a joint ministerial council under the auspices of the League of Arab States that is supported by AOAD, FAO, ESCWA and other colleagues around the table with us today.
- Second – **Capacity building** for monitoring food security based on a common regional framework, which ESCWA is expanding upon to monitor food systems outcomes – which you will hear more about in the subsequent session.
- Third – **Inclusiveness**, by promoting understanding of food inequality and proposing pathways for a just and equitable transformation that addresses food, income and livelihood concerns, such as through ESCWA activities fostering entrepreneurship through our ESCWA Technology Centre and REGEND initiative.
- Fourth – **Informing decision-making** through seasonal outlooks and our RICCAR regional climate projections, which inform interventions on surface and groundwater use, agricultural production and adaptation measures, which we pursue in collaboration with the LAS, ACSAD, WMO among others.
- And Fifth – **building the regional knowledge base** on trade in food commodities, food loss and food waste across the value chain, and the transition from a linear to a circular economy in agriculture and across the food system.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Today's stocktaking meeting will showcase what has been achieved to date and what future progress can be mobilized, particularly through effective partnerships and collaboration.

Partnerships propel us forward.

Sharing lessons allows us to benefit from each other's experiences.

Let us work together for a transformative food system that moves us closer to our common goals.

**In closing**, let me express my sincere appreciation to His Excellency Minister Abbas Haj Hasan for opening this important meeting today.

Thank is extended to our colleagues at the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, FAO, LAS, AOAD and to the national conveners who are contributing to this regional preparatory process for the global stocktaking moment in July.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.