High-Level Expert Seminar on Indigenous Food Systems

Building on traditional knowledge to achieve Zero Hunger

Opening Remarks

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Red Room, 9:00-10:00

Excellencies, Distinguished guests,

1. Welcome to this Expert Seminar on Indigenous Food Systems.

2. Seeing so many participants – over 150 I'm told- , attests to the keen recognition of the critical role of indigenous peoples in achieving the Zero Hunger and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

3. In a world challenged by a growing population, dwindling natural resources, climate change impacts and rising hunger, FAO considers indigenous peoples key partners to eradicate food insecurity and poverty.

4. Today indigenous peoples represent 5% of the world's population – that translates into over 370 million people in 90 countries speaking more than 4000 languages and occupying approximately 22% of the land surface where they are custodians of 80% of our planet's biodiversity.

5. At the same time, over centuries, indigenous peoples have created food systems that have shown exceptional levels of adaptability and resilience, shaping their livelihoods in harmony with ecosystems so that their ability to extract food from natural resources has not compromised the resource base itself.

6. We can well understand why the FAO Director General says: without indigenous peoples, we will not achieve SDG-2.

7. Yet, the lack of recognition of indigenous peoples' rights. Rights to their lands, territories and resources, and the lack of respect to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), renders them vulnerable and often marginalized with the result that they make up 15% of the world's poor.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Back in 2010 FAO began paving the way to mainstream programmes on indigenous peoples around the world.

9. Fully recognizing that our current food systems are neither sustainable nor healthy for our planet and ourselves, we must transform the way we produce and consume our food.

10. The timeliness of this high-level expert seminar is more relevant than ever as it gives us an opportunity to learn from dynamic indigenous food systems.

11. How can we build on the valuable multiplicity of food generating strategies blending: farming, shifting cultivation; nomadism; pastoralism; hunting; gathering; harvesting and fishing, which have survived until today?

12. How can we embrace key features of indigenous food systems that depend on both cultivated crops and wild plants, synergies with the natural environment and biodiversity, close adaptation to local conditions, a high level of diversification, a light carbon footprint, fewer 'negative externalities' and reduced use of external inputs while being closely tied to socio-cultural and spiritual activities?

13. What are the threats and drivers affecting indigenous food systems? How are these systems transforming with migration to cities? How do extractive activities affect indigenous territories?

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. Over the next days, you will discuss these important issues as you look at indigenous food systems as part of a sustainable food system framework that offers healthy and nutritious diets and also preserve the ecosystems we live in.

15. In the context of climate change, indigenous food systems that once were neglected, may hold some of the answers to address both today's and tomorrow's challenges.

16. Both the UN Decade of Nutrition and the forthcoming UN Decade on Family Farming offer us the opportunity to create action networks allowing indigenous peoples to play a lead role in fostering sustainable food systems.

17. We call upon a coalition of governments, indigenous organizations, academia, research institutions and UN to work together to strengthen the understanding, promotion and preservation of indigenous food systems across the world and to highlight the relevance of indigenous knowledge for food security and contributing to a Zero Hunger world.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you a fruitful seminar.