Opening remarks

Mr Jong-Jin Kim
Assistant Director-General and FAO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific

Excellency, Mr. Alongkorn Ponlaboot, Counselor to Minister of Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Kingdom of Thailand

Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Kaveh Zahedi

Director of the UN Food Systems Co-ordination Hub, Stefanos Fotiou

Food Systems Convenors from the Asia-Pacific region

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

It is my great privilege to welcome you all to the preparatory workshop for the forthcoming Stock Taking Moment in July, almost two years after the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021.

As you all would have noted, that Summit came at an opportune time – in the midst of an unexpected, once-in-an-century pandemic that brought supply chains to halt; damaged livelihoods and economies across the globe; and increased hunger and malnutrition.

The Summit played a vital role in putting food back at the centre of the global development agenda.

Some 18 months later, however, the situation has not improved, in fact it is much worse. The lingering effects of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine – the food-fuel price rise and the continuing impacts of climate change and environmental degradation are repeatedly emphasizing the need to reform our food systems.

Two months ago, FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO jointly released our flagship report, the Asia-Pacific Overview of Food Security and Nutrition.

Its main findings are grim. Nearly 400 million people in this region are undernourished. The cost of a healthy diet has reached an unacceptably high level – nearly four-dollars per person per day (USD 3.9).

That means around 40 percent of the population of the Asia-Pacific region cannot afford to eat a nutritious, healthy meal each day.

In September this year, the UN will host the SDG Summit, marking the half way point to 2030. We should also have been mid-way to achieving the SDG objectives by now but clearly we have not. As ESCAP has repeatedly emphasized, this region is likely to achieve the SDGs only by 2065, which
means – to put it bluntly, we have lost our way. It also means we would be passing this burden on to our children to see it through.

**Excellency, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen**

Accelerating the transformation of our agrifood systems is more essential than ever to achieve all the SDGs.

As our joint UN agency report explained, in order to do so, we need to recognize and respond to several trends including that of urbanization in the region. Because by 2030, the situation of both urban and rural food systems will have determined if we were able to achieve the SDG targets.

The upcoming stock take is a good moment to reflect on the progress made on the pathways of sustainable agrifood transformation, that were presented by many countries to the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021.

The period since then has been extremely challenging and we all know that countries have been coping with extraordinary economic challenges including dramatic rises in the cost of living.

This may well have dimmed our focus on agrifood system transformation.

But in October last year, FAO organized the Regional Symposium on Agrifood Systems Transformation, the first major technical follow up to the UN Food Systems Summit. We renewed our commitment and identified a range of solutions, from traditional to modern, from low tech to high tech, from those that are whole of systems-based, to those that are sectoral but can have impact at scale.

Many of you were there and I am pleased to see you all here to follow up on those discussions.

On that occasion, FAO and our sister agencies committed to work closely with countries to make transformation pathways more robust and effective and make available the best tools and instruments for change.

We have recently set up the Asia Pacific Regional Networking Group on Food Systems to synergize the work of the UN agencies and development partners.

We will continue to build new partnerships and strengthen existing ones with civil society, the private sector and development partners.

I thank you all for making the journey to Bangkok to be here today and for sharing your expertise and experience.

I look forward to an enriching workshop today and a successful stock take event later in the year.

Thank you.