



**STATEMENT BY H.E. GEORGES REBELO PINTO CHIKOTI, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC STATES, FOR THE UNITED NATIONS FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT HELD VIRTUALLY ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2021**

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The Secretary-General of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) extends warm congratulations to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for convening this inaugural and timely summit, which shines a spotlight on food and nutrition, and the urgent need for a transformational overhaul of food systems if we are to achieve the multiple aims of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As an international organisation that brings together 79 members from sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and the Blue Pacific Continent, the OACPS is moved to make this statement in furtherance of the urgent call and need to rethink, reset and holistically transform food systems. It is needed if we are to achieve the multiple Sustainable Development Goals for planet and all peoples, and contribute to prosperity, peace, and the establishment of genuine and durable partnerships.

In many parts of the OACPS, inadequate food production is still the primary cause of food and nutrition insecurity. Malnutrition is a key concern for many. For instance, in Africa today, there are millions who are hungry and many are starving. This, notwithstanding the high-levels of post-harvest food loss and waste, globally. In the OACPS' Small Island Developing States, 56% of adults suffer from obesity. Eight of the OACPS' Pacific members are in the top ten of the world's most obese nations, with malnutrition cited as the key risk factor for the burden of the non-communicable disease (NCD) crisis.

What is most worrying is that food production and associated land-use changes contribute significantly to ever-present crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. We are alive to the pressures that food production systems place on natural resources and natural systems, leading to land degradation, pollution, deforestation, and in the case of "blue food", overfishing. Furthermore, the environmental damage and climate change-related extreme weather events continue to disrupt the current food production systems, precipitating tensions in our societies, fueling community conflict, and political instability.

In the lead-up to the *United Nations Food Systems Summit* (UNFSS), the OACPS convened a high-level dialogue that explored views and pathways of enhancing access to safe and nutritious green and blue food, for the 79 members and six regions of the OACPS, while building resilience to vulnerabilities and shocks.

Further, the 112<sup>th</sup> Session of the OACPS Council of Ministers, held on 7 and 8 July 2021, adopted a decision that specifically commits to *OACPS Food Systems Transformation* (Decision No. 7/CXII/21), and resolutions on *Climate Action* (Resolution No. 1/CXII/21) and *Biodiversity* (Resolution No. 2/CXII/21), in preparation for COP26 and COP15, respectively.

The inter-connectedness and cross-cutting natures of the mentioned themes and issues are present and will need to be considered now and in the future as food systems are transformed both on-land and in-water.

The UN Food Systems Summit offers an opportunity to rethink and rebalance the now skewed concentration of power and control of food systems. This rethinking and rebalancing are necessary if we are to facilitate access to nutritious foods for all, and especially for the many that face hunger and malnutrition in all its forms.

In this context, the call of the OACPS is to expand access to capacity-building support to developing countries to improve their human resources and skills needs, and to build an enabling environment to facilitate a transformation of our food systems.

Because of the inextricable links of the food systems to societies, economies, and environmental integrity and wellbeing, the Summit provides an opportunity to catalyse the much-needed fundamental changes to ensure adaptable food systems that meet our dietary needs, are sustainable, preserve biodiversity, and are resilient to shocks such as climate change. Therefore, the outcomes of the Summit must lead to accelerated actions that promote sustainable management practices, such as agroecology, regenerative farming, and ecosystem-based approaches.

In the midst of the raging non-communicable disease and malnutrition crises, this Summit must also address the common problem of unhealthy diets, so that the transformation of food systems leads to better health outcomes and wellbeing of peoples. The OACPS underscores the importance of promoting traditional local diets and targeted fiscal policies as critical interventions to transform food systems and halt the consumption of unhealthy foods and drinks. Besides, a combination of improved food and nutrition governance, health and education programmes, and incentives will be necessary to drive the transition to sustainable and healthy diets.

The UN Food Systems Summit must also find solutions to address the frequent disaster risks and hazards that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable and the poorest of countries. These countries suffer greatly from the impacts of climate change, extreme weather events, and natural hazard risks.

The OACPS reaffirms the need for global partnerships that are genuine and durable. These are needed to develop more sustainable, inclusive and resilient food systems by supporting interdisciplinary approaches to respond to the factors that contribute to the fragility of both green and blue food systems in the OACPS, including but not limited to climate change and climate variability, emerging pandemics and epidemics, and re-emerging diseases.

By committing to transforming our food systems, we will address some of the most pressing challenges of our time. Promoting coordinated actions at all levels will ensure that the transformation of food systems becomes a critical part of the national sustainable development agenda. This will require governments, civil society, the private sector, and communities alike, to act as agents of change. This is needed for the sake of our people and our future.

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