

**Welcome Remarks by Mr. Kaveh Zahedi,  
Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and  
Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

**16<sup>th</sup> Session of the CSAM Governing Council  
4 December 2020**

Distinguished members and observer of the Governing Council,

On behalf of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), it is my great pleasure to welcome all of you to the Sixteenth Session of the Governing Council of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (CSAM).

This session of the Governing Council comes at a critical juncture. Since the beginning of the year, the COVID-19 pandemic has raged through the world, extracting a heavy toll in terms of lives. At the same time, it has jeopardized people's livelihoods and threatened food and nutrition security. In the Asia-Pacific region, even before the pandemic hit, an estimated 381 million people were undernourished – amounting to more than half of those globally. The adverse impacts of the pandemic on agriculture and food systems threaten millions more<sup>1</sup>.

Agriculture in our region is predominated by smallholder farmers, with the average size of landholdings in Asia being only 1 hectare. Together with other vulnerable segments like migrant agricultural workers, smallholders lack the resources and often the capacities to cope with crises. Under these circumstances, the cumulative impact of the pandemic can negate years of developmental gains and derail progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Supporting recovery in the agricultural sector is among the most critical needs of the hour. The United Nations Secretary-General has stressed the need to make food systems more resistant to volatility and climate shocks, to minimize food waste, and to provide decent, safe livelihoods for workers in food systems<sup>2</sup>. The whole agricultural value chain – from production to processing and retail – must be put back on track and rejuvenated. In all this, we need to take into account the immense diversity of our region and make sure the solutions are customized and adapted to national and local needs.

---

<sup>1</sup> The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020  
(<http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/online/ca9692en.html>)

<sup>2</sup> Secretary-General's message on World Food Day 2020 <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-10-16/secretary-generals-message-world-food-day-scroll-down-for-french-version>

Sustainable agricultural mechanization must play a vital role in promoting recovery and resilience. Whether it is to help farmers speed up production operations to catch the season, or enable preservation of the produce till it reaches the point of sale, use of mechanization solutions and equipment should be supported and accelerated at this time. It is also necessary to ensure that the most vulnerable segments of the agricultural workforce, elderly workers and women farmers have the capacities and access to these solutions so that the recovery is inclusive and is sustained.

As a regional institution of ESCAP, the work of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (CSAM) is directly aligned with these objectives. The Centre is making an important contribution to the ‘ESCAP Framework for Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19’ which underscores the need to ‘build back better’ through supporting recovery and enhancing resilience of societies and communities. CSAM has also taken the lead among the UN Country Team in China to convene later this month a first national dialogue on food systems, and will build up on this experience for other activities at the regional level looking forward to the Food Systems Summit convened by the Secretary-General for late 2021, which will define the future global efforts for food security.

In other areas of its work too, CSAM has achieved notable progress in recent months and years through:

- facilitating knowledge exchange and dialogue
- strengthening institutional capacities
- promoting regional norms and standards, and
- undertaking analytical work to provide knowledge resources and an evidence-base for decision-makers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As our region copes with the existing and emerging challenges, CSAM needs your guidance and support. It is heartening that members States of the CSAM Governing Council have actively engaged with and contributed to a number of CSAM initiatives during the last year, I look forward to the continued active engagement and support from the Council members in future.

To conclude, I would once again like to highlight the importance of your deliberations at the Governing Council session today for shaping CSAM’s work. I wish the meeting all success.

Thank you.