

Conflict in near East region adds pressure on fragile agrifood systems, FAO Director-General warns

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The 2026 conflict in the Middle East is adding further pressure on fragile agrifood systems and global supply chains, threatening the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), QU Dongyu, told the [38th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East](#) (NERC38).

The conference took place on Monday at the Organization's headquarters in Rome during a "critical moment" for the region, underscoring the need to recognize "the immense importance of maintaining trade flows, and of ensuring access to adequate food for all, particularly in import-dependent countries," Qu said in his opening statement.

The NERC38 was chaired by the United Arab Emirates, represented by Amna bint Abdullah Al Dahak Al Shamsi, Minister of Climate Change and Environment. The regional ministerial conference brought together Ministers and policymakers from across the region to discuss the increasingly complex and interconnected landscape of risks that severely affect agrifood systems and food security.

As a technical knowledge organization, and in line with its mandate, FAO is closely assessing the impacts of ongoing global conflicts - including the [one in the Middle East](#) - on food security and agrifood supply chains to provide the best available evidence, technical expertise, and policy support to help Members safeguard food security, strengthen resilience, and protect rural livelihoods.

The Director-General warned that the significant disruptions to food production, trade, and distribution systems currently being experienced across the region were further compounded by global implications, "including rising energy prices and disruptions in fertilizer markets, which are increasing production costs and affecting agricultural productivity both within the region and beyond."

Noting that crisis was affecting all agricultural inputs, including chemicals and machinery in addition to fertilizers, the Director-General said he had informed UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that its impact would have "long-term consequences for agriculture," even if it were to end today.

Conflicts are already severely impacting farmers, producers, and value chain actors, whose livelihoods are increasingly at risk.

"At FAO, our work is firmly grounded in the belief that the right to food is a basic human right, and that peace is a prerequisite for food security," Qu said. "Efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems are critical to support recovery, reduce vulnerabilities, and contribute to long-term stability and peace in the Near East."

For her part, Minister Al Dahak affirmed that the UAE's chairing of this session aims to drive a fundamental shift in the region's agrifood systems. The systems are set to transform from reactive crisis management to proactive innovation, empowering the region to build resilient systems that can turn environmental and geopolitical challenges into sustainable development opportunities, backed by robust logistics infrastructure and strategic partnerships that keep global supply chains secure, she said.

Ministerial Roundtables

The NERC38 organized a series of Ministerial Roundtables and Sessions designed to discuss how best to respond to the systemic shocks facing the region, focusing on four key priorities outlined by the Director-General:

Strengthen food supply chains, improve logistics, and reduce food loss and waste;

Diversify food supply sources and enhance local production capacities;

Invest in infrastructure, in agrifood enterprises, and in rural development;

Foster meaningful partnerships to translate shared priorities into impactful results.

Ministerial Roundtable I was to focus on coordinated policy actions to mitigate the impact of systemic disruptions linked to developments in energy markets and maritime trade routes. Discussions were expected to emphasize strengthening market and price monitoring, ensuring continuity of supply chains, enhancing efficiency in the use of agricultural inputs, and supporting domestic production where feasible.

Ministerial Roundtable II was to focus on accelerating sustainable agricultural production systems and circular solutions across agrifood value chains. Ministers planned to discuss policy options to strengthen value chains from production to markets, promote sustainable consumption, support bio-circular innovations, facilitate trade and reduce food loss and waste.

Ministerial Roundtable III would address the challenge of financing resilient and climate-smart agrifood systems. Participants were expected to note that climate finance flows to agrifood systems in the NENA region remain limited, despite high exposure to droughts, desertification, water scarcity and rising temperatures. Discussions would focus on mobilizing and coordinating public, private, development and climate finance; expanding the use of innovative financial instruments such as credit guarantees and agricultural insurance; and better aligning public investment with inclusive, resilient and nutrition-sensitive agrifood systems.