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I would like to now turn to the next part of this panel, and I hand over the floor to Her Excellency Mariam Al Mheiri to speak about a sustainable food system.

Mariam Al Mheiri

We go therefore from energy to food. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. First of all, thank you for your time to be here with us. Thank you also to the World Policy Conference organizers. We have had some great discussions.

I have taken the Minister of Climate Change and Environment role. Before that I was Minister of State for Food and Water Security, so I spent a lot of my years looking into food systems, and I will be talking a lot about that now. I have just started my new journey, but for me it is also a big learning lesson to see the discussions around energy and climate change. As you all know, food systems and climate change are all inextricably interlinked together.

We just had the United Nations Food Systems Summit. Sustainable Development Goal 2 – zero hunger by 2030 – is still a huge step away. There is clearly still a lot to be done. It is funny because in a way our food systems are the problem, but they are the solution as well. The more we try to ramp up our food production to overcome the effects of climate change the more we are actually contributing to climate change itself. Really what is needed now is a total commitment to food systems transformation. For us here in the UAE we see ourselves as responsible global citizens and for us to do this transformation and be part of this transformation we also have to start looking at these transformations within the UAE itself.

I just want to give you a little bit of a history. In 2008-2009 we faced our last food crisis here in the UAE and the leadership of the UAE said, “It is time we take food security more seriously than it has been. We need to start looking into how we can ensure that we are not just food secure today but also will be in the future”. In the past years, the UAE has been known as being a hub of food trade. We have our ports, national airlines and excellent infrastructure to bring huge volumes of food into the country. As you may all know, we have over 200 nationalities living here in the UAE. Everybody has their tastes and what they like to eat. Everybody likes to go to the supermarket and find foods that they usually find at home. When you see this, we are now really looking at how in moving forward we can make sure, because we are so dependent on the global food supply chains, that the UAE still has or is ensured of food security in the future. Going through Covid was also a big learning lesson for us.

Going back to our food crisis, we faced it and the leadership took many steps. One of them was to appoint a Minister of State for Food Security, which was me. This was also the first time for the UAE. With that, the first steps I took was making sure we have a plan so that the country knows where it is that we are going, because food security as a subject itself is about food trade, nutrition, food loss and food waste, food safety and ensuring you have national reserves, especially for a country that does not have the typical agricultural lands. We are not an agricultural country in itself, so you have the national storages as well.

Thinking of all those things, I had to speak with all the stakeholders and bring them together and say, "Let us create a national plan for the country to ensure that in future we are also ready and we are more resilient". We therefore launched the National Food Security Strategy 2051 in 2018, and of course for every strategy you have to have a vehicle to move this forward, so we then created the governance model for the UAE and putting it forward and then 2020 came, Covid came, and this was a big learning lesson for us. Believe me, there was a lot happening in the background, but for those who lived here, for a country that brings in more than 90% of its food, we did not face a single minute where some shelves were empty of certain food commodities. I think this really shows that as a country we have a really robust food system and that the plans we had in place, the programs, the partnerships and the political leadership were in place. The political will was there. I think these were all really important elements to showcase that the only way you can move forward in the future is to ensure that you have these elements in place.

With that, of course taking action on a global scale and helping other countries – I think a lot of you saw that we did reparation flights and we used those flights to bringing in food to the country – the UAE was really one of the leaders when it came to humanitarian aid. We sent them food. We sent them medical supplies. We therefore really took our role seriously as a responsible world citizen when it comes to food systems and towards the SDG 2.

We took part as well in the United Nations Food System Summit and, as you all know, we are now moving towards the COP26 as well, but before we go to COP26 a key element that we learned going through Covid was that actually we should start looking at what we could grow in the UAE, and it needs to make commercial sense and sustainability needs to be at the heart of it. You have all heard of vertical farms or closed-environment agriculture. These are all systems of how you can now grow food in a closed system where you can actually control the environment and where you are able to actually recirculate the water again and again and reuse it, and for us water is a precious resource as well.

We really tried to look into what to create. We have the plan and we also have the UAE food basket, so we needed to identify what our main items are. With all these 200 nationalities living in the UAE, what does the UAE actually eat? You see things like rice of course. There are other parts of the world where potatoes are more the commodity there. We were really looking into the needs of the country. What are the food items? Then from that basket, what actually makes sense to grow in the UAE? This is where the private sector then came and said, "Okay, we now have technologies. It can all be done inside. We just need a small space and we need connection to water and electricity". This is where you get the whole connection of energy and water, and the whole idea now is hopefully one day how we can grow food without using expensive unsustainable energy sources and being able to use water, treated

wastewater, for example, in the system to have food for everybody. I often say there are the three Ss: how can we use the sun, the sea and the sand to produce food?

The UAE wants to become not just a hub for food trade but a hub for technology, innovation and knowledge when it comes to growing certain foods in environments such as in the UAE. This is where we are moving towards. I am sure some of you have heard of the AIM for Climate initiative which was announced at the leaders' COP summit by President Joe Biden and our Prime Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid. It is called Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate, AIM for Climate, and it is all about how countries can come together, share data, share knowledge and accelerate research and development needed to transform our food systems. We see this as a duty that we must do and we have already started. The first initiative was announced to create a valley or a playground called Food Tech Valley. This is what I like to call a playground of where we hope to see future clean tech-based food technologies and food systems come alive. This is where we try to attract youth and more women into the sector to try and look at how we can grow food differently. We are really excited about these projects moving forward.

As I was saying, these are some of the glimpses into what we are doing. I do not want to go on and on about the initiatives that we have done, but the UAE is really taking big steps into transforming our own food systems and also helping other countries as well. Of course, as we move now to COP26, unquestionably the most important edition of the summit since the inaugural COP was held in Berlin in 1995, the UAE is really fully committed to playing a leading role at the summit. We have been one of the few countries in the region to submit a second NDC, or National Determined Contributions, ahead of December 30, 2020 deadline, which included a region-first economy-wide target of a 23.5% reduction of emissions by 2030. I believe this translates into an absolute emission reduction of about 70 million tons.

We also support the G77 and China position that developed countries need to deliver on the USD 100 billion of public financing they promised in 2009. Although as a developing country the UAE is not part of this pledge, we believe in helping fellow developing countries. Here are some examples: we are major investors in renewable energy projects in over 70 countries. Mubadala and Masdar are two examples who have made huge investments in this area. We have provided billions of dollars in humanitarian relief for climate disasters. We have provided over USD 1 billion of grants and soft loans for renewable energy power projects in developing countries.

We will be delivering a high-level participation at COP26 with our supplementary initiatives, including the launch of AIM for Climate, which I just talked about, with the USA, and this is a voluntary initiative that brings together participants to increase and accelerate global innovation, research and development on agriculture and food system transformation in support of climate action. We like to lead by example and show efforts in transforming our food systems. We know that this is not easy and it takes a change of mindsets as well, and we are experiencing this in the UAE, making the people understand that we need to move forward with these transitions, we need to look at how we can empower companies, for example, that have agtech technologies and say, "You know what, we are ready to grow strawberries in the UAE", to actually grow strawberries in the UAE. What we have done a lot is to listen to what the private sector needs, and in doing so what we are trying to do is change



the blueprint of the country, because the blueprint of the country so far has been very much based on trade, food trade, but now changing the blueprint is attracting investment to the UAE.

There are small things like access to finance and there should be insurance companies to insure your produce. Some people may think this is actually the basics, but these are things that we have to actually lay the foundation for in the UAE to try and look at how we can now attract agtech companies to develop in the UAE. With that, I will stop talking and take your questions.