



Union for the Mediterranean  
Union pour la Méditerranée  
الإتحاد من أجل المتوسط

## **2<sup>nd</sup> World Conference on the Revitalization of the Mediterranean Diet**

**Opening session: *A Mediterranean Contribution on Environment and Sustainable Co-Development to the Summit of the Two Shores***

**Intervention by Nasser Kamel**

**Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean**

*Palermo, 15 May 2019*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a great pleasure for me to be participating in this World Conference, particularly this session on the Mediterranean Contribution on Environment and Sustainable Co-development to the "Summit of the Two Shores".

Indeed, putting together such an event provides a unique opportunity to tackle several sustainability challenges.

In this regard, I would like to thank both the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) and the Forum on Mediterranean Food Cultures for co-organizing this event.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the sponsors of this conference, particularly the Italian Government, the Sicilian Region and City of Palermo, and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

This conference gathers a large number of close partners to the UfM with whom we already cooperate.

We have worked with CIHEAM on agriculture, rural development and migration, with FAO, through Silva Mediterranean, on Forestry and land degradation.

The UfM is now working with CIHEAM and FAO on a Mediterranean food systems platform, which aims at framing the Mediterranean diet as a tool for implementing sustainable consumption and production in the region, as well as a model for promoting inclusive regional development.

The UfM welcomes very much the idea of using the concept of a Mediterranean diet as a basis for promoting a transformative vision of food systems from an integral point of view.

This unique conference brings together several ongoing challenges in our Mediterranean, and aims to use our common heritage on agriculture and food to form a better future for generations to come, as well as help us meet several dire environmental and social challenges in our region.

Furthermore, the approach that is proposed to us at this conference is stimulating and we look forward to seeing how the wealth of possibilities it has can be translated into new transversal initiatives for joint action and can feed into the regional initiative "Sommet de Deux Rives" (S2R) and thus gain the direct backing of the Heads of State of countries participating in this important initiative, to which the UfM is associated.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

Our Mare Nostrum has always been a bridge among cultures and a pathway towards exploration that shaped the world as we know it today.

While such heritage has endured for ages, it is becoming increasingly challenged by growing economic activity and several aspects of globalization.

Moreover, the Mediterranean has become an important centre of attention in a regional context characterized by environmental degradation.

This is particularly relevant given the fact that the Mediterranean holds nearly 28% of endemic species and 7.5% of the World's marine Fauna, not to mention 18% of its marine flora. Furthermore, our coastal cities that witnessed the birth of democracy, knowledge, and culture are becoming under constant and growing human pressure with more than 150 million coastal residents and more than 200 million tourists per annum.

As you are all aware, the Mediterranean is one of the most vulnerable climate change hotspots in the world.

The lower threshold of temperature increase of 1.5 degrees established by the Paris Agreement has already been exceeded due to expanding anthropogenic impact, which further aggravates existing environmental, economic and social challenges.

Such adverse impacts, coupled with population increase, exert strong pressure on natural resources, including fresh water, soil, and biodiversity, hereby jeopardizing our capacity for food production and sustainable consumption, not to mention adversely affecting our livelihoods, and life style in the Mediterranean.

Given the cross-boundary nature of such challenges, regional dialogue and concerted efforts have become more crucial than ever.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The Union for the Mediterranean seeks precisely to address these challenges utilizing a comprehensive approach to address the three strategic objectives of stability, human development and regional integration.

Moreover, the "UfM Roadmap for Action" approved by our Member States in January 2017, links our work to the achievement of the global UN Sustainable Development Goals, making us, in a sense, the regional chapter of these global efforts.

To illustrate, addressing the impact of climate change, particularly on social and economic activities in the region, has been a matter of paramount importance for the UfM.

The Secretariat currently endeavors to identify the relationship between climate change, on one hand, and major economic sectors, such as tourism and agriculture, on the other hand.

Moreover, and in order to address the acute water shortage in our region, the UfM Secretariat has been actively engaged in developing the UfM Water Agenda and its financial strategy, which were adopted by our Senior Officials last December, aiming to support the development of policies and investments that can help UfM countries to achieve water security and climate-resilient economies, as well as adopt better planning for water resource allocation, water

efficiency, and to promote investments in infrastructure for a more reliable water supply.

The UfM also seeks to Find common solutions to our common problems, aligning approaches, bringing together institutions, and developing common projects, such as those that the UfM labels, or those that we expect will be taken up at the S2R.

It is in this context that issues of environmental sustainability, the promotion of development based on circular and green economy approaches, sustainable consumption and production, and an integral view of the interlinked fields of agriculture, energy, water and food provide a template for action in which the UfM is also strongly invested.

In this regard, the UfM supports a Positive Agenda for the Mediterranean through an environmentally responsible development, preventing marine pollution, combatting marine litter, strengthening cooperation in the fields of research and innovation, promotion of investment to benefit the water sector in Mediterranean countries and promoting common action for the climate agenda.

Furthermore, the UfM, currently endeavours, in close coordination with our co-chairs and Mediterranean stakeholders, to mobilise Mediterranean efforts around a new future post-H2020 initiative to promote the preservation of its natural resources, to prevent pollution and to launch the region into a circular economy future.

We are working as well with the European Commission on organising a 2<sup>o</sup> regional stakeholders conference on Blue economy, following the one that took place in Naples in November 2017.

These mandates have already provided the region with an overarching framework to mobilise actors in the region around common objectives towards sustainable development.

For all these reasons, the UfM will integrate the conclusions of this Conference in its own work and will seek partnerships to promote and realise the main objectives of the conference.

Furthermore, we look forward to seeing these conclusions contribute to the upcoming high-level political forum of the “Sommet des deux rives” and hope that all participants at the Forum will take them up as their own.