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'I/A' ITEM NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: Conclusions on the EU's priorities for an effective Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to ensure a sustainable future and food security for all
- Approval

1. In the second half of 2022, under the Czech Presidency, the Working Party on International Food and Agricultural Questions (FAO) started discussions aimed at defining the strategic medium-term priorities of the EU and its Member States for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Delegations agreed that setting such priorities was particularly relevant in view of the upcoming election of FAO's Director-General scheduled for July 2023.
2. In the first half of 2023, the Swedish Presidency took discussions forward and tabled draft Council conclusions, which the Working Party examined in detail at its meetings on 17 January and 21 February 2023, in parallel with an extensive written consultation process.
3. In the context of the above discussions, delegations stressed the key contribution that FAO has to make in driving the transformation towards sustainable food systems and addressing the intrinsically linked challenges related to the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and natural

resource degradation. Delegations also acknowledged that FAO's role in leading multilateral efforts to eradicate hunger and all forms of malnutrition and to achieve food security and nutrition for all was as vital as ever in the context of the current unprecedented food crisis, which has been severely exacerbated by Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine.

4. On 9 March 2023, following a final written consultation, the Presidency noted the Working Party's agreement on the text of the draft Council conclusions set out in ST 5114/4/2023 REV4.¹
5. In view of the above, the Permanent Representatives Committee is invited to confirm the agreement reached by the Working Party and to recommend that the Council approve the conclusions as set out in the annex to this note as an "A" item at one of its forthcoming sessions.

¹ Subsequently, the final draft text of the Council conclusions was distributed with reference ST 5114/5/2023 REV5.

Draft
COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS
on the EU's priorities for an effective Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations (FAO) to ensure a sustainable future and food
security for all

The Council of the European Union,

- 1) REAFFIRMS its strong commitment to multilateralism and the rules-based international order, with the UN system at its core, to provide effective responses to the major challenges of our time that call for global solutions, with full respect for universal human rights;
- 2) REITERATES its unwavering commitment to and UNDERLINES FAO's essential contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the UN Convention on Combating Desertification;
- 3) STRESSES the key contribution that FAO has to make in driving the transformation towards sustainable food systems and addressing the intrinsically linked challenges related to the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and natural resource degradation;
- 4) HIGHLIGHTS the vital role of FAO, as an impartial and member-led UN agency, in leading multilateral efforts to eradicate hunger, all forms of malnutrition and achieving food security and nutrition for all, as well as in tackling poverty;
- 5) EMPHASISES the importance of FAO as a specialised knowledge-based organisation, in establishing norms and standards based on scientific evidence and knowledge, and in providing technical support and capacity-building, including for policy-making by its members;

- 6) IS DEEPLY CONCERNED about the unprecedented food crisis the world is facing, affecting in particular the poorest countries and most vulnerable populations, and thereby deepening inequalities; REITERATES its resolute condemnation of Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, whose negative and long lasting impacts on food security are severely exacerbating the crisis;
- 7) REAFFIRMS the EU's strong commitment to respond to global food insecurity and REITERATES its full support for the UN-led efforts to avert further escalation; RECOGNISES FAO's efforts to monitor and address the consequences of Russia's war of aggression for food security both in Ukraine and globally and URGES FAO to intensify those efforts, fully implementing the relevant decisions by the FAO governing bodies ².

FAO's role in building a sustainable future

- 8) ACKNOWLEDGES the crucial contribution that FAO is making in the areas of agriculture, including livestock, forestry, fisheries, and aquaculture to build a sustainable future; in this regard, RECALLS the Council conclusions on the EU's priorities for the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit ³ and CALLS on FAO to increase its efforts in the following key areas by:
- taking the lead in advocating and supporting the transition towards resilient and sustainable food systems by promoting the right to adequate food and a transformative food systems approach which delivers safe and nutritious food and healthy diets for all, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable populations, while contributing to solutions to climate change and environmental challenges;
 - continuing to foster a competitive, diversified, sustainable and resilient agriculture, livestock and forestry sector that integrates the three dimensions of sustainability on an equal footing, in particular by promoting solutions, innovations and best practices to transform food systems and increase productivity while averting land, water and forest degradation as well as biodiversity loss;

² In particular the decision adopted by the FAO Council at its 169th session.

³ 9335/21.

- advocating sustainable and integrated resource management practices as well as resource efficiency, bearing in mind increased pressures from a growing world population and the fragility of ecosystems both on land and in water;
- contributing to coherent sustainable solutions to the multiple and transboundary water challenges that duly recognise the water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus, taking forward agreed UN agendas;
- advancing its work on combating global deforestation, including on internationally agreed definitions, and on desertification, applying integrated landscape approaches and supporting international cooperation in this field;
- stepping up efforts to fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and promote sustainable fisheries contributing to food security and improved international ocean governance, including through actively promoting and supporting the implementation of legally binding instruments for eliminating unsustainable fishing practices;
- promoting and supporting synergies between agriculture, including livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, to take advantage of shared opportunities, address shared challenges and mitigate trade-offs;
- stepping up its work on innovative sustainable business models and value chains, with a particular focus on circular economy, bioeconomy and nature-based solutions, in collaboration with the private sector and all relevant actors, to provide additional and alternative decent livelihoods along the entire food chain and thereby enhance resource-efficiency and reduce waste, paying due attention to the local perspective and the needs and contributions of smallholders and family farmers;
- harnessing the potential of innovation and digitalisation, with due respect of relevant legal frameworks, to sustainably increase productivity and transform food systems.

FAO's role in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus for addressing food insecurity

- 9) ACKNOWLEDGES FAO's essential work on addressing food insecurity and malnutrition in the world; RECALLS its concern regarding conflict as a driver of food insecurity and INVITES FAO to guide action in support of vulnerable countries and populations, with particular regard to women and girls, by:
- developing its contribution to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus at global, regional and local level through collaboration with other relevant organisations, in line with its mandate and comparative advantages, while continuing to adhere to and promote the humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law in its emergency programming;
 - strengthening investment in early warning systems, taking anticipatory action and putting forward short- and medium-term policy proposals aimed at addressing emerging crises effectively and rapidly, supporting early recovery activities and guiding the rehabilitation of the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors and rural livelihoods, with a long-term development perspective;
 - monitoring the effects of conflict on global food security, and the associated risks, and continuing to provide members with timely, high-quality information on market developments and disruptions of agri-food supply chains, in support of well-functioning, open and predictable trade which is in line with WTO rules and market transparency through proven initiatives such as the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS).

FAO's role in the wider UN System

- 10) STRESSES the importance of ensuring continued close alignment of FAO's work with the wider UN agenda through a human rights approach, delivering as One UN, and CALLS on FAO to:
- champion the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda, including the important task in monitoring and reporting the SDG indicators under its custodianship and in supporting Members' work to track their progress on the SDGs;

- ensure the effective implementation of the UN development system reform through close cooperation and dialogue through the Resident Coordinator system for efficient coordination with the wider UN system at country level;
- continue strengthening its cooperation and cross sectoral work with other UN agencies and bodies, and in particular to further enhance its collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), and support other relevant UN led initiatives based on synergies and comparative advantages;
- actively support the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) as an inclusive multi-stakeholder platform for promoting world food security and sustainable food systems, and its High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE), and promote the uptake and utilisation of CFS policy recommendations and voluntary guidelines;
- continue to support the follow-up to the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), in close cooperation with other UN agencies, governments, civil society organisations, the private sector and other actors as well as facilitating an effective and efficient Coordination Hub and in supporting Members in the realisation of their transformative pathways.

Improved effectiveness and governance of FAO, for greater impact and better results

- 11) HIGHLIGHTS the need for continued efforts to ensure FAO's capacity to deliver effectively on its mandate, in line with the guidance provided by the FAO governing bodies and in accordance with the needs and expectations of its members;
- 12) WELCOMES the alignment of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022 –2031 with the SDGs, increased focus on evidence based and science-based decision making and the strengthening of the Office of Evaluation and the Office of the Inspector General; ACKNOWLEDGES the positive work on the prevention of harassment, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as regarding improved risk management;

13) EXPECTS further improvements regarding governance, effectiveness, transparency, impartiality, accountability, and risk management, in line with the highest UN standards and guided by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), in close dialogue with FAO members, including in the following areas:

- results-based management and performance reports, with a particular focus on decentralised offices and on programmes and projects, including alignment of corporate policies with actions at country level, as well as improved utilisation of country-level knowledge in FAO corporate policies;
- a strengthened focus on achieving results and impact at country level through the development of a programmatic approach, ensuring a transparent and predictable programming process as well as collaboration at country level with key actors;
- the development of a comprehensive vision for the funding of the organisation, including the use of assessed and voluntary contributions, the management of the various funding arrangements and how these contribute to the achievement of the organisation's objectives and the strategic framework in an effective, efficient and transparent way;
- timely, transparent and easy access for Members to information relevant to the governance of the organisation, including Country Programming Frameworks, procurement arrangements and partnership agreements with third parties, with due attention to the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement;
- human resources management through policies that are underpinned by diversity, equality, transparency, and merit;
- increased gender equality and inclusiveness, with proper regard for achieving gender parity in senior positions and integrating the perspectives of women and girls, young people and indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities at all levels, including through the use of sex, age and disability disaggregated data;

- the highest standards and best practices with respect to data governance, ensuring the right to privacy and protection of personal data, intellectual property rights as well as independent oversight of the implementation of data policy;
- robust safeguards to ensure the integrity and complete secrecy of voting by secret ballot, adhering to best practices in the UN system in this area.

Cooperation of the EU and its Members States with FAO

- 14) UNDERLINES the longstanding and fruitful partnership between FAO and the EU and its Member States; RECALLS the significant support that the EU and its Member States provide to FAO, including through voluntary contributions;
- 15) LOOKS FORWARD TO enhanced dialogue and collaboration in advancing the global sustainability and climate agenda in relation to agriculture, including livestock, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture and food security and nutrition, particularly through:
- the implementation of the FAO strategies on climate change, biodiversity and science and innovation;
 - thematic leverage points for food systems transformation, including crop-, protein- and fertiliser diversification, promoting animal welfare and livestock with less impact on the climate, agroecology and other innovative approaches, preserving and improving soil health, reducing pollution, dependency on chemical pesticides and the use of fossil fuels in agriculture, and addressing food loss and waste along the entire food chain;
 - the One Health approach to better address complex health challenges for humans, animals, plants, and the environment, including joint efforts through the Quadripartite, to reduce antimicrobial resistance in food systems and strengthening their resilience against pandemics, as well as work on combatting transboundary diseases;

- foresight initiatives, research, all forms of innovation and knowledge sharing, including through farmers education networks and cooperation between FAO and research and academic institutions and other stakeholders in the EU;
 - standard-setting and normative activities, including as part of the Codex Alimentarius Commission's work on food safety and quality standards to protecting the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in food trade and as part of the International Plant Protection Convention's work with due attention to the application of a One Health approach in the risk analysis process;
 - gender equality, women and girls' empowerment and gender-transformative approaches as well as promoting the role of youth in rural areas;
 - the Global Network against Food Crises as the global alliance of humanitarian and development actors committed to tackling the underlying causes of food crises and promoting sustainable solutions.
 - the Global Soil Partnership for improved soil governance and soil health.
- 16) Affirms the commitment of the EU and its Member States to consolidate and reinforce their cooperation with FAO and to continue working with the FAO membership to ensure effective FAO action for a sustainable future and food security for all.