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COUNCIL

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Composition of the Council

Executive summary

This document responds to the request by the 175th Session of the Council for a comprehensive paper on the composition of the Council.

The Council is established by Article V of the Constitution, and acts as the executive arm of the Conference, the supreme Governing Body of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

It is currently composed of 49 Member Nations elected by the Conference from across the seven regions of FAO. Initially set at 18 Member Nations in 1947, the composition of the Council has been changed seven times by the Conference since, each time through amendments of the Constitution and relevant General Rules of the Organization.

This document outlines the current state of the composition of the Council, its historical evolution, criteria considered, and past discussions on the composition undertaken by Members.

Suggested action by the Council

The Council is invited to take note of the information presented in this document.

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

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I. Introduction

1. The 175th Session of the Council¹ requested the preparation of a comprehensive information document on the composition of the Council.
2. Accordingly, this document highlights elements of the FAO Basic Texts which determine the current function and composition of the Council. It also articulates the dynamic evolution of the composition of the Council since its inception, and outlines the historical criteria considered, and discussions undertaken by FAO Members on Council composition.

II. Background and Scope

3. The Council is the executive arm of the supreme Governing Body of FAO, the Conference. It is currently composed of 49 Member Nations from across the seven regions of the Organization, each elected by the Conference to serve a term of three years.
4. At its inception in 1947, the Council consisted of 18 Member Nations,² and its composition has been changed by the Conference seven times since then, the last such instance at its 19th Session in 1977. Each such change has required an amendment to the Constitution and the relevant General Rules of the Organization (GROs).
5. Since 1977, Members have engaged in numerous discussions on the composition of the Council, including after the 2007 Independent External Evaluation of FAO, as well as dedicated discussions by the Conference in 2009, 2011, 2015 and, most recently, at its 43rd Session in 2023.
6. This document outlines the *status quo* of the Council (section III), the evolution of its composition from 1947 to 1977 (section IV), the historical discussions by the Conference from 1977 to 2023 (section V), past criteria and methodology considered by Members (section VI), and it presents in Annex I the distribution of Council seats by region since the first change in 1953.

III. Status Quo

7. The Council is established by Article V of the Constitution, which states that:³ “*A Council of the Organization consisting of forty-nine Member Nations shall be elected by the Conference.*”
8. The 49 seats of the Council are distributed among seven Regions and currently allocated as follows: 12 seats for Africa, nine seats for Asia, ten seats for Europe, nine seats for Latin America and the Caribbean, six seats for the Near East, two seats for North America and one seat for the Southwest Pacific.
9. Member Nations are elected by the Conference to the Council for terms of three years in accordance with GRO XXII,⁴ which envisages, *inter alia*, that the term of office of 16 Members of the Council shall expire in each of two successive calendar years, and that of 17 Members shall expire in the third calendar year.⁵
10. GRO XXIV establishes the Council as the executive arm of the Conference: “*The Council, subject to the provisions of paragraph 3 of Article V of the Constitution, shall, between sessions of the Conference, act on behalf of the Conference as its executive organ and make decisions on matters that need not be submitted to the Conference.*”

¹ CL 175/REP, subpara. 27 (b).

² The 18 Members were: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, France, India, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Philippine Republic, Union of South Africa, United Kingdom and United States (*Report of the 1st Session of the Council, 4-11 November 1947* [CL 1/REP], Annex II).

³ Article V, para. 1.

⁴ Rule XXII, subpara. 1 (a) of the GRO.

⁵ Rule XXII, subpara. 1 (b) of the GRO.

11. The Basic Texts articulate further the functions of the Council, following Conference Resolution 8/2009, including with regard to world food and agriculture, strategic direction and programme of work and budget, as well as administrative, financial and constitutional matters.⁶

12. The three Council Committees, namely the Programme Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters are established by paragraph 6 of Article V of the Constitution, which also defines the reporting of the Technical Committees and the Regional Conferences.

13. Finally, GRO XXIII outlines the appointment of the Independent Chairperson of the Council: “*In pursuance of paragraph 2 of Article V of the Constitution, the Conference shall appoint an independent Chairperson of the Council [....]*”

IV. Evolution

14. As noted above, the Council was established in 1947 with 18 Member Nations. Since then, its composition was changed seven times by the Conference, namely in 1953, 1959, 1961, 1965, 1967, 1973 and in 1977. This dynamic evolution of the composition of the Council has led to its current membership of 49 Member Nations.

15. The first expansion of Council seats was endorsed by the Conference in 1953, increasing the number from 18 to 24.⁷ Recognizing the importance of providing more Member Nations with the opportunity to serve on the Council, the Conference recommended that candidatures for the additional seats be limited to Member Nations which had never been previously elected to the Council.⁸ During the same Session, the Conference allocated Council seats to each specific region, to ensure geographical representation.⁹ Additionally, the Conference emphasized that, since there was a need to ensure a balanced geographical representation, a periodic examination of the seat distribution would be necessary, not only to take into account the changing circumstances, but also to introduce improvements that would ensure the most equitable distribution of seats.¹⁰

16. In 1959, the Conference endorsed the addition of one seat for Africa, bringing the total number of Council seats to 25.¹¹ This decision was based on the Members’ agreement that the three principles established in 1953¹² should continue to guide the allocation of new Council seats.

17. In 1961, the Conference decided to increase the Council Membership from 25 to 27, allocating two more seats to Africa. The Conference also supported the Council’s recommendation to cap the membership of the Council at no more than one-third of the total membership of the Organization, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a manageable and representative governance structure. Additionally, the Conference invited Members to give serious consideration to the principle of rotation, to ensure continued interest and participation of all FAO Members and maintain the efficient functioning of the Organization.¹³

18. In 1965, the Conference endorsed a further increase in the number of Council seats to 31, with three of the four additional seats allocated to Africa and one to Latin America.¹⁴ Following further negotiations, in 1967, the Conference decided to increase the number of Council seats to 34, with one of the additional Council seats allocated to the Region of Asia and the Far East, the second to Europe and the third to the Near East.¹⁵

⁶ Rule XXIV of the GRO.

⁷ *Report of the 7th Session of the Conference, 23 November – 11 December 1953* (C 1953/REP), para. 274.

⁸ *Report of the 7th Session of the Conference, 23 November – 11 December 1953* (C 1953/REP), para. 278.

⁹ *Report of the 7th Session of the Conference, 23 November – 11 December 1953* (C 1953/REP), para. 350.

¹⁰ *Report of the 7th Session of the Conference, 23 November – 11 December 1953* (C 1953/REP), para. 351.

¹¹ *Report of the 10th Session of the Conference, 31 October – 20 November 1959* (C 10/REP), para 569.

¹² Now codified in Rule XXII, para. 3 of the GRO.

¹³ *Report of the 11th Session of the Conference, 4-24 November 1961* (C 1961/REP), paras 418-422.

¹⁴ *Report of the 13th Session of the Conference, 20 November – 9 December 1965* (C 1965/REP), paras 413-414.

¹⁵ *Report of the 14th Session of the Conference, 4-23 November 1967* (C 1967/REP), paras 539-541.

19. In 1973, the Conference further decided to increase the number of Council seats from 34 to 42, with two additional seats allocated each to the Regions of Africa, Asia and the Far East, and Latin America, and one additional seat each to the Regions of Europe and the Near East.¹⁶

20. The last expansion of the Council membership took place in 1977, raising the total number of seats to 49.¹⁷ Three additional seats were allocated to Africa, and one to the Regions of Asia and the Far East, Europe, Latin America and the Near East, respectively. Despite this expansion, many delegations at the Conference considered this increase as a compromise, arguing that their regions remained underrepresented, and that the adjustments did not provide a permanent solution to achieving equitable geographical representation on the Council. Accordingly, the Conference requested this matter be further examined by the Council or by a Working Party created by the Council.¹⁸

V. Discussions

21. Following the last change in 1977, Members have discussed, deliberated and considered further changes to the composition of the Council, including in the mechanisms following the issuance of the 2007 Independent External Evaluation of FAO, as well as by the Conference in 2009, 2011, 2015 and, most recently, at its 43rd Session in 2023.

22. The 2007 Report of the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of FAO was presented to the 35th Session of the Conference, which noted “[...] *various anomalies and imbalances regarding the composition of regional groupings for purposes of election to the Council and its subsidiary bodies. This issue has not been tackled in the past in the FAO Governing Bodies [...]*.”¹⁹

23. Upon completion of the IEE, an Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) was developed to address the findings of the Evaluation and make recommendations for their implementation; the IPA was presented in 2008, during the 35th (Special) Session of the Conference, in the Report of the Conference Committee on the follow-up to the IEE of FAO (CoC-IEE). The CoC-IEE recommended, in IPA Action 4.4, that the Conference enact at its regular session in 2009 “*any changes found desirable in the size and regional representation in the membership of the Council*”.

24. In 2009, the Conference discussed a proposal to amend Article V.1 of the Constitution to increase Council seats from 49 to 61. The Conference agreed to defer consideration of this issue and established, under CoC-IEE, an Open-Ended Working Group to review and recommend measures designed to increase the efficiency of the Governing Bodies, including representation.²⁰ The CoC-IEE was ultimately unable to reach consensus on the issue of the Council composition.

25. In 2011, another proposal to amend Article V.1 of the Constitution to increase Council Membership from 49 to 61 was considered, but no consensus was achieved thereupon.

26. The Conference re-examined the issue in 2015, as part of the Independent Review of FAO Governance Reforms. However, the Independent Review recommended suspending any action regarding the size and composition of the Council until it was determined there was sufficient consensus among Members for a satisfactory solution.²¹ The Conference thus adopted Resolution 7/2015, in which it decided (among other things) to suspend IPA Action 4.4 on the size and composition of Council, until such consensus was reached.²²

¹⁶ *Report of the 17th Session of the Conference, 10-29 November 1973* (C 1973/REP), paras 308 and 310.

¹⁷ *Report of the 19th Session of the Conference, 12 November – 1 December 1977* (C 1977/REP), para. 291.

¹⁸ *Report of the 19th Session of the Conference, 12 November – 1 December 1977* (C 1977/REP), para. 292.

¹⁹ *Report of the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), September 2007* (C 2007/7A.1 - Rev.1), para. 780.

²⁰ *Report of the 36th Session of the Conference, 18-23 November 2009* (C 2009/REP), paras 155-156.

²¹ *Independent Review of FAO Governance reforms – Final Report* (C 2015/25), Recommendation 4.

²² *Report of the 39th Session of the Conference, 6-13 June 2015* (C 2015/REP), para. 74, point 3 of Resolution 7/2015.

27. In 2023, at its 43rd Session, the Conference noted the issue of regional representation on the Council for future consideration by the relevant Governing Bodies of the Organization,²³ following consideration of a proposal to expand by one the number of seats allocated to one specific region only.

VI. Criteria

28. The first criteria to select Council Members were presented in 1947, during the 3rd Session of the Conference, through the Report of the General Committee, which stipulated that “*in selecting members of the Council due consideration shall be given to the inclusion in its membership of a balanced geographical representation of nations interested in the production, distribution, and consumption of food and agricultural products.*”²⁴

29. At the 6th Session of the Conference, the idea of increasing Council membership was first proposed, in view of “*general sympathy with the proposal which would give Member Countries a greater opportunity to participate in the Council’s work and would thus maintain interest in the Organization during the periods between regular sessions of the Conference.*”²⁵

30. In 1953, the Conference established three guiding principles for the selection of Council Members, which are now codified in Rule XXII, paragraph 3 of the GRO. The Conference must:

“a) includ[e] in its membership a balanced geographical representation of nations interested in the production, distribution and consumption of food and agricultural products;

b) ensur[e] the participation in the work of the Council of such Member Nations as contribute in a large measure towards the success of the Organization;

*c) giv[e] to the greatest possible number of Member Nations an opportunity, by rotation of membership, to serve on the Council.”*²⁶

31. In 1955, the Conference discussed the geographical distribution of Council seats and specified that the number of countries in any region should not be the only criterion used to determine the number of seats allocated to each region. Several other factors required consideration in determining such allocations. The Conference, at its following session, mandated the Council to consider in detail all aspects of the problem of geographical distribution of the Council, with a view to submitting recommendations back to the Conference.²⁷

32. In 1960, the Council identified a list of further criteria to be considered when determining the allocation of Council seats among the regions:²⁸

- a) the number of Member Nations in each region;
- b) the common climatic and agricultural conditions;
- c) the population factor in each region;
- d) the importance of agriculture in relation to the total economy of regions; and
- e) the seriousness of their food and nutritional problems.

33. In 1961, a further criterion was considered to guide decision on the alteration of the composition of the Council. The Conference supported the Council’s recommendation to limit the number of Council seats to no more than one-third of the total membership of the Organization, with a view to maintaining a manageable and representative governance structure.²⁹

²³ *Report of the 43rd Session of the Conference, 1-7 July 2023 (C 2023/REP)*, para. 68.

²⁴ *Report of the 3rd Session of the Conference, 25 August – 11 September 1947, (C 1947/REP)*.

²⁵ *Report of the 6th Session of the Conference, 19 November – 6 December 1951 (C 1951/REP)*, paras 355-356.

²⁶ *Report of the 7th Session of the Conference, 23 November – 11 December 1953 (C 1953/REP)*, para. 274.

²⁷ *Report of the 8th Session of the Conference, 4 – 25 November 1955 (C 1955/REP)*, para. 339.

²⁸ *Report of the 34th Session of the Council, 17 – 27 October 1960 (CL 34/REP)*, para. 126.

²⁹ *Report of the 11th Session of the Conference, 4-24 November 1961 (C 1961/REP)*, para. 420

Annex I

Seat Distribution over the years (tables)

Seat distribution in 1953	
Region	Number of Council seats
Africa	1
Asia and the Far East	5
Europe	7
Latin America and the Caribbean	5
Near East	3
North America	2
Southwest Pacific	1
Total	24

Seat distribution in 1959		
Region	Additional Council seats	Number of Council seats
Africa	+1	2
Asia and the Far East		5
Europe		7
Latin America and the Caribbean		5
Near East		3
North America		2
Southwest Pacific		1
Total	+1	25

Seat distribution in 1961		
Region	Additional Council seats	Number of Council seats
Africa	+2	4
Asia and the Far East		5
Europe		7
Latin America and the Caribbean		5
Near East		3
North America		2
Southwest Pacific		1
Total	+2	27

Seat distribution in 1965		
Region	Additional Council seats	Number of Council seats
Africa	+3	7
Asia and the Far East		5
Europe		7
Latin America and the Caribbean	+1	6
Near East		3
North America		2
Southwest Pacific		1
Total	+4	31

Seat distribution in 1967		
Region	Additional Council seats	Number of Council seats
Africa		7
Asia and the Far East	+1	6
Europe	+1	8
Latin America and the Caribbean		6
Near East	+1	4
North America		2
Southwest Pacific		1
Total	+3	34

Seat distribution in 1973		
Region	Additional Council seats	Number of Council seats
Africa	+2	9
Asia and the Far East	+2	8
Europe	+1	9
Latin America and the Caribbean	+2	8
Near East	+1	5
North America		2
Southwest Pacific		1
Total	+8	42

Seat distribution in 1977		
Region	Additional Council seats	Number of Council seats
Africa	+3	12
Asia and the Far East	+1	9
Europe	+1	10
Latin America and the Caribbean	+1	9
Near East	+1	6
North America		2
Southwest Pacific		1
Total	+7	49