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## COUNCIL

### Hundred and Seventy-sixth Session

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### FAO@80: Proposals for Institutional Renewal

**Strengthen the agrifood systems we need for a better world and  
a better future for all**

#### Executive summary

This document contains proposals for institutional renewal of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), building upon and completing the transformations introduced since the Director-General took office in 2019.

The proposed measures encompass constitutional, governance and leadership aspects of FAO, aligned with the aspirations of its Members, for approval by the 2025 Conference marking the 80th anniversary of Organization.

The proposals are thus aimed at making FAO more fit for purpose for the future, within the context of the evolving global development agenda, as pertinent to the mandate of the Organization.

#### Suggested action by the Council

The Council is invited to review the following proposed measures for institutional renewal of FAO, with a view to making recommendations for approval by the 44th Session of the Conference:

- Constitution – strengthening the Constitution with the philosophy of the Four Betters
- Governance – reinforcing the functioning of the Council and the Regional Conferences
- Leadership – bolstering the effectiveness of the Office of the Director-General

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## I. Introduction

1. Measures are proposed for institutional renewal of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), coinciding with the milestone of the 80th anniversary of its founding, and continuing the efforts to enhance the Organization's capacity to strengthen the agrifood systems needed for a better world and a better future for all. These measures complement the transformations introduced since the Director-General took office in 2019.

2. Actions for institutional renewal have been underway since 2019, with the introduction of strategic, organizational and programmatic transformations of the Organization. The 80th anniversary offers a window of opportunity for further actions for renewal to ensure an FAO ever more fit for purpose. At this juncture, measures are proposed in areas relating to the Organization's Constitution, Governance and Leadership, completing the institutional renewal of FAO, and marking its 80th anniversary.

## II. Background

3. Since its founding in October 1945, FAO has repeatedly undertaken institutional adjustments in order to better meet the evolving current and future needs of its Membership. These adjustments have also been driven by new trends and challenges pertinent to the Organization's mandate, as well as the global development agenda including, for example, the Declaration of Rio on Environment and Development and *Agenda 21: Programme of Action for Sustainable Development*, the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals, the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, and the outcomes of multilateral fora addressing climate change and biodiversity.

4. Adjustments introduced over the last 79 years have included constitutional amendments, changes to the governance architecture, as well as to the structure and functioning of the Organization.

5. Since its establishment, FAO's Membership has increased from 42 Member Nations to 194 Member Nations, one Member Organization, and two Associate Members. Adjustments to FAO's governance architecture have been made reflecting the increases in the Membership of the Organization itself and, thus, of its Conference, its supreme Governing Body.

6. The composition and regional distribution of the FAO Council has been amended seven times since 1945, rising from 14 Member Nations to the current 49 Member Nations, from across the seven regions of the Organization.

7. Significant changes in the governance architecture resulted from the 2007 Independent External Evaluation of FAO ("the IEE"), including the formalization of the Regional Conferences as Governing Bodies of the Organization, changes to the composition of the Council Committees, and refinement of the role of the Independent Chairperson of the Council (ICC).

8. Separately, in an effort to ensure optimal leadership of the Organization, the term of office of the Director-General has changed five times since 1945, through constitutional amendments enacted by the Conference.

9. Renewal led by past Directors-General has touched on many fundamental aspects of the Organization with a view to best meeting the needs and priorities of the Membership. These have included, *inter alia*, amendment to the preamble of the Constitution of the Organization (1965), the introduction of the Technical Cooperation Programme and creation of the FAO Country Office Network (1976); structural reforms (2005); and transformational changes (2012).

## III. Vision

10. Since taking office in 2019, the Director-General has led the institutional renewal of FAO, aimed at a more efficient, modern and dynamic Organization, effective in delivering against the current and future needs of its Members in areas falling under its mandate.

11. A cardinal element of this institutional renewal thus far has been the renewal of the strategic vision of the Organization, encapsulated in the Strategic Framework 2022-31, as endorsed by the

Members, complementing the global development agenda, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and outcomes of climate and biodiversity Conferences of Parties. This is framed by an aspirational philosophy, articulated by the Four Betters: *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*, leaving no one behind.

12. To advance this philosophy, renewal has prioritized a systems-based approach to agrifood systems transformation, with a firm base in science and innovation and promoting partnerships within and beyond FAO.

13. Organizational and programmatic transformations have been introduced to translate the philosophy of the Four Betters into action, bringing together the resources, expertise and human capital of the Organization to work as One FAO.

14. These transformations have included the introduction of modular management at headquarters and Regional Offices, Decentralized Offices' transformation, the establishment of the Office of Innovation and the creation of the role of Chief Scientist, as well as the creation of dedicated offices for Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries, the Sustainable Development Goals, and for Youth and Women. Other transformations aimed at FAO's renewal include the establishment of the World Food Forum, the Hand-in-Hand and the One Country One Priority Product initiatives, and the FAO Museum. The transformation has also led to the refocusing of the Joint FAO/WHO Centre (Codex Alimentarius and One Health) and the Joint FAO/IAEA Centre (Nuclear Techniques in Food and Agriculture). Accompanying these institutional changes has been unprecedented digitalization, strengthened communication, as well as increased transparency in the work of the Organization.

#### IV. Scope

15. This document outlines proposals to complement and complete the institutional renewal initiated by the Director-General in 2019. The proposals cover the following areas:

- a) **Constitution** - subsume the aspirational philosophy of the Four Betters into the Constitution of FAO;
- b) **Governance**
  - i. Council composition – adjust the composition of the Council for improved regional representation of Member Nations (paragraphs 29-34);
  - ii. Independent Chairperson of the Council – enhance clarity and strengthen the independence of that role, while building trust through transparency (paragraphs 35-43);
  - iii. Council bureau – establish a formalized mechanism for intersessional work of the Council, supporting the Independent Chairperson of the Council in the discharge of her/his functions (paragraphs 44-51);
  - iv. Council Committees – establish a new Inclusion and Diversity Committee (IDC) to support the Membership's general oversight with respect to activities addressing the needs of youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, and rural populations, as well as guide efforts to ensure diversity and inclusion within the Organization (paragraphs 52-61);
  - v. Regional Conferences – strengthen the role of the Regional Conferences and more fully address the needs of subregions and countries (paragraphs 62-68);
- c) **Leadership**
  - i. Term of appointment of the Director-General – align the term with those of other major UN system organizations (paragraphs 71-80);
  - ii. Remuneration of the Director-General – reflect the complexity of the role (paragraphs 81-86).

16. These proposals are presented for consideration by the Council at its 176th Session, with a view to submitting by its 177th Session recommendations for decision by the 44th Session of the Conference, coinciding with the 80th anniversary of the founding of FAO.

## V. The Constitution

17. The fundamental instruments of the Organization, including its Constitution, have been adjusted from time to time in order to reflect evolutions in the international community.

18. For example, in 1965, the Conference, through its Resolution 12/65, amended the Preamble of the Constitution to explicitly refer to the objective of “*ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger*”.<sup>1</sup> This amendment was adopted by the Conference in light of the presentation of the draft Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to the UN General Assembly, following the recommendation of the FAO Council which had noted that the draft Covenant “*formally recognized the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger*”.<sup>2</sup>

19. Consequently, the Preamble to the FAO Constitution includes this addition (underlined) as set out below:

*“The Nations accepting this Constitution, being determined to promote the common welfare by furthering separate and collective action on their part for the purpose of:*

*raising levels of nutrition and standards of living of the peoples under their respective jurisdictions;*

*securing improvements in the efficiency of the production and distribution of all food and agricultural products;*

*bettering the condition of rural populations; and thus contributing towards an expanding world economy and ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger;*

*hereby establish the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, hereinafter referred to as the “Organization”, through which the Members will report to one another on the measures taken and the progress achieved in the field of action set forth above.”*

20. In more recent years, the international community has recognized that food security and freedom from hunger are intrinsic to eradicating poverty and are cornerstones to sustainable development. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development opens, as its first paragraph after its Preamble, with the following commitment:

*“We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.”*<sup>3</sup>

21. Furthermore, in its Resolution 78/168, adopted on 19 December 2023, the UN General Assembly, *inter alia*,

*“Emphasizes that sustainable agricultural production, food security, nutrition and food safety are key elements for the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, and calls for greater efforts to sustainably enhance the agricultural production capacities, productivity and food security of developing countries”.*<sup>4</sup>

22. More recently, at the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly, Heads of State and Government adopted the Pact for the Future.<sup>5</sup> They pledged, *inter alia*, to undertake “*comprehensive and targeted strategies to achieve inclusive economic growth and sustainable development, food*

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<sup>1</sup> See [C 1965/REP](#), paragraphs 398 *et seq.*, and [CL 44/REP](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [C 1965/REP](#), paragraphs 398 *et seq.*, and [CL 44/REP](#), paragraphs 95-98.

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly [resolution 70/1](#), [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly [resolution 78/168](#), [Agriculture development, food security and nutrition](#).

<sup>5</sup> UN General Assembly [resolution 79/1](#), [The Pact for the Future](#).

*security and the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, and to combat the feminization of poverty, in order to meet the needs of the present generations, achieve global resilience and establish a more prosperous foundation for future generations”.*<sup>6</sup>

23. In supporting multilateral efforts to address these global priorities, FAO’s renewal over the last few years has prioritized a systems-based approach to agrifood systems transformation, articulated by the Four Betters: *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*, leaving no one behind.<sup>7</sup>

24. The aspirations that underpin the Four Betters address economic, social and environmental dimensions to generate food security and nutrition for present and future generations, as reflected in the Strategic Framework 2022-31:

<b>Better production</b>	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, through efficient and inclusive food and agriculture supply chains at local, regional and global level, ensuring resilient and sustainable agrifood systems in a changing climate and environment.
<b>Better nutrition</b>	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition in all its forms, including promoting nutritious food and increasing access to healthy diets.
<b>Better environment</b>	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and combat climate change (reduce, reuse, recycle, residual management) through more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.
<b>Better life</b>	Promote inclusive economic growth by reducing inequalities (urban/rural areas, rich/poor countries, men/women).

25. It is proposed that the Organization’s foundational instruments reflect the aspirations Members have articulated in many multilateral fora. For example, following the precedent from 1965, the Preamble of the Constitution could be adjusted as follows (underlined):

*“The Nations accepting this Constitution, being determined to promote the common welfare by furthering separate and collective action on their part for the purpose of:*

*raising levels of nutrition and standards of living of the peoples under their respective jurisdictions;*

*securing improvements in the efficiency of the production and distribution of all food and agricultural products;*

*bettering the condition of rural populations;*

*and thus contributing towards an expanding world economy, better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind and ensuring humanity’s freedom from hunger;*

*hereby establish the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, hereinafter referred to as the “Organization”, through which the Members will report to one another on the measures taken and the progress achieved in the field of action set forth above.”*

26. In conclusion, on its 80th anniversary, it is proposed that FAO consider renewing its affirmation of the continued importance of its Constitutional objective of establishing efficient,

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Annex II, Declaration on Future Generations, paragraph 17.

<sup>7</sup> The agrifood system covers the journey of food from farm to table – including when it is grown, fished, harvested, processed, packaged, transported, distributed, traded, bought, prepared, eaten and disposed of. It also encompasses non-food products that also constitute livelihoods and all of the people as well as the activities, investments and choices that play a part in getting us these food and agricultural products. In the FAO Constitution, the term “agriculture” and its derivatives include fisheries, marine products, forestry and primary forestry products (CL 166/REP, footnote 6).

inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for present and future generations, leaving no one behind.

## VI. Governance

27. As observed above, the Members have made several adjustments to the Organization's governance architecture since 1945 to address the evolving Membership and to meet new demands and priorities for effective delivery of its mandate. The last most significant review of the Organization's governance was undertaken following the Independent External Evaluation of FAO<sup>8</sup> of 2007.

28. The outcome of the IEE was implemented through the Immediate Plan of Action for FAO Renewal (IPA) in 2008-2009. Since the IPA, FAO has made targeted adjustments to its ways of working. The 80th anniversary of the Organization presents an opportunity to build on these efforts, strengthening the capacity to respond to the needs and priorities of its Membership.

### A. Reviewing the composition and size of the Council

29. The original Constitution of FAO provided that the Conference be assisted by an Executive Committee. At its 3rd Session in 1947, the Conference amended Article V of the Constitution, replacing the Executive Committee with the Council, comprising 18 Member Nations elected by the Conference for 3-year terms of office.<sup>9</sup> At that time, there were 44 Member Nations of FAO. As described in document CL 176/INF/7, the composition of the Council has since evolved to more accurately reflect the Membership as it has grown.

30. The composition of the Council was last adjusted in 1977, when there were 183 Member Nations of the Organization. At that time:

*“The need to keep the Council to a manageable size in order to retain efficiency was noted. However, the Council recognized that the increase in the Organization's membership since the present size of the Council had been established and the need for improving the geographical representation of certain regions, especially that of Africa, would call for a limited increase in the size of the Council. In this connexion, it was also pointed out that equitable distribution did not relate solely to the number of Member Nations in any region.”<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> [C 2007/7A.1-Rev.1.](#)

<sup>9</sup> [C 1947/REP.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [CL 71/REP](#), paragraphs 208-11.

31. The Council's recommendations at its 71st Session in 1977, subsequently endorsed by the Conference,<sup>11</sup> were the outcome of negotiations and did not follow a strictly numerical formula. They resulted in the current Council composition:

<b>Region</b>	<b>Member Nations</b>	<b>Council seats</b>
Africa	49	12
Asia	25	9
Europe	48	10
Latin America and the Caribbean	33	9
Near East	21	6
North America	2	2
Southwest Pacific	16	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>49</b>

32. While the Membership of the Organization has increased since 1977, consultations among Members on adjusting the composition of the Council following the IPA in 2009 and the Independent Review of FAO Governance Reforms in 2015 did not reach consensus. Consequently, in 2015, the Conference decided to suspend discussions on the size and composition of Council, until the Members consider that there is sufficient consensus to achieve a satisfactory solution.<sup>12</sup>

33. Since then, from time to time there have been calls for increased opportunities to participate in the Council, ensuring that differing concerns and priorities may be voiced. Many regions have expressed concern that they are under-represented in the Council. As mandated by the 43rd Session of the Conference and the 175th Session of the Council, informal consultations are ongoing concerning Council seats, including a specific proposal for one additional seat for the Southwest Pacific region.<sup>13</sup>

34. Building on this momentum, on the 80th anniversary of the Organization, Members could assess whether there is sufficient consensus to achieve a satisfactory solution in deliberations on the size and composition of the Council. It is proposed to adjust the Council composition to 55 Member Nations, allocated amongst the regions as follows:

- Africa, 13
- Asia, 10
- Europe, 11
- Latin America and the Caribbean, 10
- Near East, 7
- North America, 2
- Southwest Pacific, 2

<sup>11</sup> [Conference resolution 16/77](#), adopted at its 19th Session.

<sup>12</sup> [C 2015/REP, paragraph 74, and paragraph 3 of Resolution 7/2015](#), regarding IPA Action 4.4.

<sup>13</sup> [C 2023/REP](#), paragraph 68; [C 2023/PV](#), page 245; [CL 175/REP](#), paragraph 27.



### B. Enhancing clarity on the role of the ICC

35. When establishing the Council in 1947, the Conference also created the office of the Independent Chairperson of the Council.<sup>14</sup> This followed consideration of the Report of Commission III of the Conference which reflects, *inter alia*, as follows:

*“The Commission agreed by a vote of 20 to 6 that there should be an independent Chairman of the Council who would [b]e an impartial representative of all the member nations. The question whether the Conference or the Council should select the Chairman was discussed at some length. Some members were of the opinion that the Council should be free to choose its Chairman, but others thought that the Conference, which is the sovereign body and which includes all the members of FAO, should have this responsibility. It was finally agreed that the Constitution should provide that the Conference appoint the Chairman and that the Chairman should be appointed for one year and be eligible for re-election.”<sup>15</sup>*

36. This office, to which the incumbent is elected by the Members Nations in the Conference to serve, under current provisions for a two-year term which may be renewed only once, is unique in the UN system.

37. More than 60 years after the creation of the office of ICC, the IPA introduced changes, as set out in Resolution 9/2009, vesting the ICC with an enhanced role in facilitating the exercise by the Council of its governance functions and general oversight of the working of the Organization.<sup>16</sup> In so doing, it also aimed to ensure that this enhanced role does not create any potential for conflict of roles with the managerial functions of the Director-General in the administration of the Organization.

38. The unique nature of the office of ICC is emphasized in the Conference’s view in 1947 that the ICC “*would [b]e an impartial representative of all the member nations*”. Given the mandate of the Council, and the role of the ICC as articulated in 1947, the actual and perceived impartiality of the ICC is essential to the proper functioning of FAO’s governance and, in particular, the Council.

39. Moreover, in recent years the Members and the Director-General have prioritized an ethical FAO which operates with integrity.

40. It is proposed that visibility be given to these core concepts through the adoption of a code, or integration of key concepts into an existing instrument, as has been done by the UN General Assembly which adopted a Code of Ethics for the President of the General Assembly.<sup>17</sup>

41. Further clarity could also be desirable as regards the role and functions of the ICC with respect to other FAO Governing Bodies, including those reporting directly to the Conference on policy and regulatory matters.<sup>18</sup> Such efforts could reinforce the governance architecture adopted by Members through the IPA.<sup>19</sup> For example, the purposes of engagement between the ICC and those other Governing Bodies – and their Chairpersons – could be elaborated upon. These could include, for example, facilitating the exchange of information between the Council and those Governing Bodies and, as appropriate, assisting in the preparation of the Council’s consideration of their

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<sup>14</sup> [Section IV C](#), Amendments to the Constitution of FAO, Report of the Conference of FAO, Third Session, Geneva, Switzerland, 25 August - 11 September 1947.

<sup>15</sup> [C 1947/REP](#), Section V, Commission Reports, Report to the Conference by Commission III (constitutional, administrative, and financial questions), Item 7 of agenda - Report of preparatory commission (chapter VII) and amendments to the constitution and rules of procedure, section 4.

<sup>16</sup> [Resolution 9/2009](#) “Implementation of the Immediate Plan of Action regarding the Independent Chairperson of the Council”, Section E of Volume II of the Basic Texts.

<sup>17</sup> Annex XI to the [Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly](#), document [A/520/Rev.20](#).

<sup>18</sup> The Regional Conferences, the Committee on Commodity Problems, the Committee on Fisheries, the Committee on Forestry and the Committee on Agriculture.

<sup>19</sup> For example, the IPA confirmed that “*The Council will no longer discuss global policy and regulatory issues, unless there is an urgent reason to do so (to be handled by the Technical Committees and the Conference)*”, [C 2009/7](#), Action 2.23.

recommendations which have programmatic, financial or constitutional implications for the Organization, requiring the Council to make recommendations to the Conference.

42. It is also proposed to further clarify the Conference's intent when it recognized "*the need to ensure that an enhanced role of the Independent Chairperson of the Council should not create any potential for conflict of roles with the managerial functions of the Director-General in the administration of the Organization, as called for by the IPA*".<sup>20</sup> In this context, Members could have regard to the distinction between governance and management, reflected in Article VII, paragraph 4, of the Constitution which establishes that "[s]ubject to the general supervision of the Conference and the Council, the Director-General shall have full power and authority to direct the work of the Organization".

43. In summary, the 80th anniversary of FAO may provide the opportunity for Members to take actions to affirm their expectations of the office of the ICC; a unique office created to support them in the governance of FAO.

### *C. Enhancing efficiency through the establishment of a bureau of the Council*

44. The work of the Council and its ICC is extensive. Yet, FAO is the only UN specialized agency which has no bureau supporting its executive governing body in preparing for its sessions. All other specialized agencies have bodies – referred to variously as a bureau, steering committee, or executive committee – which have no decision-making authority but which play a central role in facilitating governance.

45. The Rules of Procedure adopted by the Council at its first session in 1947<sup>21</sup> provided that the Council elect a first Vice-Chairperson and a second Vice-Chairperson annually following the election by the Conference to fill vacancies on the Council.<sup>22</sup>

46. Over time, the Rules of Procedure have been amended. They currently provide that, at the beginning of each session, the Council elects three Vice-Chairpersons who remain in office until the election of new Vice-Chairpersons at the next session of the Council. In the temporary absence of the ICC, one of the Vice-Chairpersons may preside. The functions of the Vice-Chairpersons are not otherwise elaborated upon. If the ICC is unable to discharge the functions of her/his office for the remainder of her/his term, the Chairperson of the Programme Committee assumes the functions of the ICC for the remainder of the term.

47. The Council has full agendas to address at its regular sessions, comprising complex, sensitive and diverse matters. However, the Council has only five planned sessions each biennium, which each lasts a maximum of 5 days. The pressures on Council Members with the many calendar commitments related to the Rome-based Agencies – alongside, for some Members, responsibility for bilateral relations – would appear to preclude longer or additional Council sessions.

48. Members may wish to explore mechanisms to facilitate efficiency in the work of the Council, such as the establishment of a bureau of the Council, while preserving the unique role of the ICC. The Vice-Chairpersons could, for example, be replaced with a bureau elected by the Council from among its Members and chaired by the ICC.

49. A bureau could assist the ICC in discharging her/his role in representing all Members and in her/his work during the intersessional period in preparing for the sessions of the Council, complementing the ICC's consultations with the Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of the Regional Groups. It could also perform such other functions delegated to it by the Council to facilitate its effective and efficient functioning. Indeed, the experience of other Governing Bodies appears to confirm the significant assistance that these subsidiary bodies – without decision-making authority – can provide in preparing for sessions.

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<sup>20</sup> Preambular paragraph of [Resolution 9/2009](#); Section E, Volume II, [Basic Texts \(2017\)](#).

<sup>21</sup> [CL 1/REP, Annex III](#).

<sup>22</sup> Rule I; Officers of the Council.

50. The composition of a bureau could, for example, be based upon the number of seats allocated to each region for the Council, with bureau members being elected at the first regular session of the Council immediately after the Conference, for a term of office to run until the next Council elections. Applying a ratio of 3:1 to the current number of Council seats (49) allocated to each region would result in a bureau with 17 Members, allocated as follows among the Regional Groups:

- Africa, 4
- Asia, 3
- Europe, 3
- Latin America and the Caribbean, 3
- Near East, 2
- North America, 1
- Southwest Pacific, 1

51. In conclusion, in light of the nearly 80 years that have passed since the creation of the Council, it is proposed that the institutional framework be adjusted to include a Council bureau to strengthen the efficient functioning of the Council and its capacity to discharge its governance role.

#### *D. Assisting the Council in its work addressing inclusion and diversity*

52. Pursuant to Article V, paragraph 6 of the Constitution, the Council Committees assist the Council in the performance of its functions. These are the Programme Committee, the Finance Committee and the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters. Their Members are elected by the Council, and the representatives of the elected Members are called upon to have relevant expertise.<sup>23</sup>

53. The Organization has increasingly focused on ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in its activities for its stakeholders and internally.

54. For example, the Strategic Framework 2022-31 identifies “*the themes of gender, youth, and inclusion (for reduced inequalities and leave no one behind, LNOB)*” and reflects the Organization’s intent to “*promote a more systematic mainstreaming and operationalization of these issues across all of FAO’s work*”.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, as reflected in the Strategic Framework, “[w]hile the whole Agenda 2030 is grounded on the leave no one behind principle, still certain groups within society such as the elderly, children and youth, women, as well as indigenous people, in many instances face risking discrimination and marginalization”.<sup>25</sup>

55. These general principles align with priorities and objectives set in the broader UN system, including in the UN General Assembly. For example, the Pact for the Future includes commitments to promote tolerance and embrace diversity. It specifically recognizes the needs of youth, women and Indigenous Peoples.

56. Further, as regards the internal functioning of UN system entities, the Chief Executives Board (CEB) – of which the FAO Director-General is a member – has underscored the need to ensure a diverse workforce and an inclusive workplace. In particular, in 2023, the CEB High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) endorsed the DEI Vision and Principles, including the vision of: “*A United Nations System of Organizations that is fair, diverse and inclusive, where everyone belongs, is equal and valued*”.<sup>26</sup>

57. The importance of these values in the UN system could, in the context of the renewal of FAO at 80 years old, call for a mechanism to embed and mainstream them throughout the work of FAO, internally and through its programme delivery. For example, Members could consider establishing an

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., General Rules of the Organization, Rule XXVI, paragraphs 1 and 2, concerning the Programme Committee.

<sup>24</sup> [Paragraph 71](#).

<sup>25</sup> [Annex 1](#), Critical drivers of agri-food systems and related trends, paragraph 8.

<sup>26</sup> [CEB/2023/HLCM/29/Annex 2](#).

Inclusion and Diversity Committee mandated to assist and advise the Council, alongside the other Council Committees.

58. The IDC could help ensure that the Organization's global policies and strategies, and activities address the inequalities experienced by women, youth, small producers, Indigenous Peoples and rural populations. This would, in turn, support the Organization's goals of strengthening agrifood systems, aspiring to *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*, leaving no one behind. As part of this mandate, it could consider how the Organization could engage with relevant partners, including Civil Society Organizations, to address such inequalities.

59. As regards the internal functioning of the Organization, the IDC could assist the Council in its general oversight functions. Thus, for example, it could receive Management's reports on human resources and related matters, supporting the CEB's approach to promoting DEI principles in UN system organizations. It could provide general guidance on policies aimed at promoting inclusion, diversity and gender parity, and preventing sexual exploitation, sexual harassment and other serious forms of misconduct that undermine the values of the Organization.

60. In order to enhance efficiency, some matters currently addressed by the other Council Committees could be transferred to the IDC to benefit from its special expertise (e.g. human resources reports). Matters which are also within the specialist competence of other Council Committees could be considered concurrently by those Committees and the IDC. For example, the IDC could provide its expert inputs on elements in the Strategic Framework or the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) relating to gender or youth empowerment, which could be considered by the Council alongside the recommendations of the other Council Committees.<sup>27</sup>

61. The 80th anniversary presents an opportunity to renew FAO's governance architecture to reflect the DEI priorities that have been recognized by Members and across the UN system. The establishment of the proposed Council Committee to advise the Council on DEI matters would be a landmark step in the actions being taken to leave no one behind.

#### *E. Reinforcing regional, subregional and country-level governance*

62. Prior to the IPA in 2009, the Regional Conferences could not bring regional governance matters to either the Council or the Conference except through the Director-General.<sup>28</sup> The IPA transformed the status of the Regional Conferences, introducing paragraph 6 of Article IV of the Constitution and Rule XXXV of the General Rules of the Organization (GRO), establishing the framework for Regional Conferences.<sup>29</sup> The Regional Conferences became Governing Bodies, reporting directly to the Conference on policy and regulatory matters, and to the Council through the Programme and Finance Committees on matters having programmatic or budgetary implications for the Organization.<sup>30</sup>

63. Since that time, the primary strategic and planning documents adopted or endorsed by the Members have consistently underlined the importance of delivery of FAO's mandate at regional, subregional and country levels, while also recognizing that there may be national particularities.

64. However, at present, priority-setting, governance and general oversight are concentrated at FAO headquarters at the global level.

65. The functions of the Regional Conferences set out in Rule XXXV of the GRO are extensive. A more focused application of those functions, accompanied by enhanced political engagement and strategic direction at the regional and subregional levels, could support stronger regional governance

<sup>27</sup> In a manner similar to the legal and constitutional inputs that the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters provides from time to time on matters that are also under consideration by the Finance or Programme Committees.

<sup>28</sup> See [Report of the Independent External Evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#), C 2007/7A.1-Rev.1, paragraphs 147 h), and 699.

<sup>29</sup> [Resolution 5/2009](#).

<sup>30</sup> [Rule XXXV](#), paragraph 3.

and priority-setting. Through the adoption of an appropriate instrument, such as an FAO Conference resolution, Members could be encouraged to take steps to strengthen the Regional Conferences' capacities to contribute to global monitoring and planning exercises, and to address their particular needs and priorities.

66. Firstly, and recognizing that the composition of delegations is a sovereign matter, Members could consider enhancing the deliberations in the Regional Conferences by:

- a) securing representation at the most senior ministerial levels at the Regional Conferences, confirming the full political engagement of the Members concerned, and lending additional authority to the conclusions of the Regional Conferences; and
- b) encouraging interministerial delegations to include Ministers and Senior Officials addressing all aspects of the Organization's mandate,<sup>31</sup> and all related cross-cutting or interlinked issues.<sup>32</sup> This would enhance consistency of national positions in all Governing Bodies of FAO and other UN system entities addressing related topics.

67. Secondly, Members, through their participation in Regional Conferences, could consider:

- a) more fully reflecting the diversity within regions in their Conference outcomes which are taken into account in the development of the PWB, strengthening the focus on the varying needs of the countries in each region; and
- b) establishing subsidiary mechanisms, such as regional or subregional intergovernmental committees, to meet annually or biannually to identify and consider regional and subregional priorities and initiatives. Such mechanisms may facilitate each Regional Conference's review of the reports on the Regional Results at their biennial sessions.<sup>33</sup>

68. The elements identified above are consistent with the functions of the Regional Conferences set out in Rule XXXV of the GRO. The 80th anniversary of the Organization presents an opportunity to build on the IPA outcomes, and to renew the capacity of the Organization and its Governing Bodies to identify and address regional, subregional and country-level priorities and needs.

## VII. Leadership

69. The Director-General is elected by the Conference and vested with the authority to direct the work of the Organization subject to the general supervision of the Conference and of the Council.<sup>34</sup> Managing FAO so that it is able to effectively support its Members and stakeholders in the delivery of its mandate requires an exceptional capacity to articulate a vision for its future, and the ability to implement it in partnership with its Members.

70. As FAO celebrates its 80th anniversary, Members may wish to consider – in the context of renewal – actions that may facilitate the discharge of this complex role, and attract talent of the highest order to fulfil it.

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<sup>31</sup> The Organization's mandate, as provided in Article I, paragraph 1, of the Constitution covers "nutrition, food and agriculture" and that the term "agriculture" and its derivatives include fisheries, marine products, forestry and primary forestry products.

<sup>32</sup> Such as gender, youth and inclusion, the technical themes of climate change and biodiversity, as well as the cross-cutting/cross-sectional "accelerators" identified in the Strategic Framework: technology, innovation, data and complements (governance, human capital and institutions).

<sup>33</sup> Currently, the Regional Conferences address the reports on their Region's Results in varying manners. See, e.g., [ARC/24/REP](#), paragraph 11 et seq.; [APRC/24/REP](#), paragraph 24 et seq.; [ERC/24/REP](#), paragraph 34 et seq.; [LARC/24/REP](#), paragraph 23 et seq.; [NERC/24/REP](#), paragraph 44.

<sup>34</sup> [Rule XXXVIII](#) of the GRO.



### A. *The term of office*

71. The term of office and term limits for the office of the Director-General, which are established in the Constitution, have been subject to many adjustments since FAO was established in 1945.

72. The most recent adjustment followed the IPA. This introduced the four-year term of office, renewable once for a further term of four years. Prior to this, paragraph 1 of Article VII of the Constitution in the 2008 edition of the Basic Texts provided:

*“There shall be a Director-General of the Organization who shall be appointed by the Conference for a term of six years. He shall be eligible for reappointment only once for a further term of four years.”*

73. Most UN system organizations provide for either a four-year<sup>35</sup> or a five-year term of office for their executive heads.<sup>36</sup> Most also limit – by rules or practice – the number of terms that can be served to two terms.

74. Alongside the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), FAO is one of the largest UN specialized agencies and, like them, has a broad technical and normative mandate. By rules or practice, the UN, ILO, and WHO establish a maximum ten-year limit to their executive heads, composed of two five-year terms. Given the breadth and complexity of FAO’s mandate, alignment by FAO with the maximum term limit applied in the UN, ILO and WHO may be appropriate.

75. However, unlike the appointing Governing Bodies in the UN, ILO and WHO which meet annually, the FAO Conference meets only once every two years. Thus, rather than two five-year terms, reinstatement of the pre-IPA terms of office – one six-year term with the possibility for reappointment for one final four-year term – is proposed for consideration by the Members. There are a number of specific reasons for this proposal, as described below.

76. The unique governance structure of FAO could support a slightly longer term in office. Deliberations on Management’s proposals on the future strategic direction of the Organization and mechanisms to deliver its mandate, as well as on related resources, take place within each of the 12 Governing Bodies<sup>37</sup> that report to the Conference and, as appropriate, the Council. It is only after those deliberations – lasting at least two years – that specific proposals can be presented for endorsement by the Council and approval of the Conference. Therefore, it is only after two years in office and mid-way through the first term of office that a newly elected Director-General can begin executing the strategic vision for which she/he was elected. The application of the pre-IPA six-year first term of office would enable a Director-General to more fully implement their vision, under the general oversight of the Conference and Council.

77. Another possible benefit of reinstating the pre-IPA terms of office is that this would provide a future Director-General with a fuller opportunity to build relationships with Members. To successfully deliver FAO’s mandate for the benefit of its Members and stakeholders, constructive relationships between Members and Management are key. A transition to a longer first term would facilitate stronger collaboration between Members and Management in guiding the future direction of the Organization. This may also support decision-making with a long-term perspective.

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<sup>35</sup> International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Universal Postal Union (UPU) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

<sup>36</sup> The International Labour Organization, the World Health Organization and, as a matter of practice, the UN.

<sup>37</sup> The Programme Committee, the Finance Committee, the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters, the Committee on Agriculture, the Committee on Commodity Problems, the Committee on Fisheries, the Committee on Forestry, and the Regional Conferences for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Near East. These were defined in the 36th Session of the Conference (see paragraph 142 of the [Report of the 36th Session of the Conference](#)), as set out in Section B, Volume II, of the [Basic Texts \(2017\)](#).

78. Enabling the potential for a maximum of 10 years of office – instead of the current 8 years – may also make the role of the executive head of FAO more attractive to highly qualified candidates having the necessary vision to guide the Organization’s work in a manner that meets the Membership’s evolving needs. Aligning the possible full-term of office with those of the executive heads of the UN, ILO and WHO could also affirm the stature of FAO as one of the most important organizations in the UN system.

79. This proposal does not touch upon any of the existing checks and balances. Members’ oversight is maintained; the current cycles for the Strategic Framework and PWB, and the established mechanisms for accountability and transparency in the relevant Governing Bodies, would continue to enable Members to have a careful overview of the Organization’s strategic and operational priorities and needs. Moreover, there would be a milestone at the expiry of the first mandate at which the Members could confirm their support for the Director-General’s leadership of the work of the Organization.

80. The reinstatement of the pre-IPA terms of office for the Director-General – one six-year term with the possibility for reappointment for one final four-year term – is proposed, having regard to the long-term interests of the Organization.

### *B. Attracting talent at the highest level*

81. Currently, many UN specialized agencies award their executive heads a salary based on that of the Administrator of the UN Development Programme. However, such an approach does not take into account the significant differences in the roles and responsibilities of the chief executives of the different specialized agencies.

82. As noted above, FAO is one of the largest and most complex of the UN specialized agencies. It is one of the few organizations where normative functions are discharged alongside operational technical activities, and where work is delivered not only by its divisions and offices, but also by numerous statutory bodies. The broad nature of FAO’s functions and mandate places a burden of responsibility upon the executive head that is not matched in most other UN specialized agencies, nor the UN funds or programmes whose heads are accountable to the UN Secretary-General.<sup>38</sup>

83. In addition to directing the work of FAO, a unique function of the FAO Director-General is her/his role *vis-à-vis* the World Food Programme (WFP), “*an autonomous joint subsidiary programme of the United Nations and FAO*”.<sup>39</sup> Consistent with its status, the Director-General and the UN Secretary-General appoint the WFP Executive Director after consultation with the WFP Executive Board.<sup>40</sup> Article VII of the WFP General Regulations confirms that the Executive Director represents WFP “*without prejudice*” to the authority of the Secretary-General and the Director-General.<sup>41</sup>

84. The scope of the Director-General’s responsibilities *vis-à-vis* WFP are illustrated by the following examples:

- a) WFP draws on the UN and FAO’s legal personality and some significant agreements are concluded by the UN and FAO on behalf of WFP (such as the host country agreement with the Italian Republic).

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<sup>38</sup> For example, the Director-General is directly accountable to the Governing Bodies for the proper administration and utilization of resources that, in the 2024-25 budget, amounted to USD 4 billion. The Director-General is also charged with ensuring that FAO’s approximately 16 500 employees worldwide, located at headquarters and in more than 140 countries, correctly perform their functions in line with the Basic Texts and consistent with the standards of the international civil service.

<sup>39</sup> Article VIII of the [WFP General Regulations](#).

<sup>40</sup> Article VII of the [WFP General Regulations](#).

<sup>41</sup> In practical terms, with FAO and WFP being co-located in Rome, the UN sometimes looks to FAO to act on behalf of both organizations in respect of WFP matters, e.g. through attendance at certain Executive Board meetings.

- b) WFP personnel are hired under FAO rules, they use the FAO internal justice mechanisms, and the Director-General takes the final decisions on WFP staff appeals. FAO is the defendant in appeals by WFP staff before the ILO Administrative Tribunal.
- c) Decisions on requests for assistance to meet emergency needs which exceed the level of authority delegated to the Executive Director must be made jointly by the Executive Director and the Director-General.<sup>42</sup> As provided in the current Delegation of Authority, the Executive Director requires the joint approval of the Director-General for amounts in excess of USD 50 million.<sup>43</sup>

85. Thus, the relationship between FAO and WFP is not simply one of two Rome-based sister agencies. The relationship involves duties and obligations for the FAO Director-General arising from the operations of WFP. The responsibilities of the FAO Director-General *vis-à-vis* two large UN system entities, unlike the Directors-General of other specialized agencies who bear responsibilities for a single organization, support the enhancement of the remuneration package awarded to the FAO Director-General.

86. The adjustment of the terms and conditions associated with the office of Director-General to ensure that the most highly qualified individuals present their candidatures for this important office is thus proposed.

### VIII. Conclusions

87. The 80th anniversary of the Organization is an opportunity for its Members to revitalize their aspiration for FAO, and renew and reinforce the institution for the future, within the context of the evolving global development agenda relevant to the Organization's mandate.

88. This document thus lays out proposals relating to FAO's Constitution, Governance and Leadership, building on the transformations Members have supported since the Director-General took office in 2019. They aim to make the Organization more fit for purpose to meet the aspirations of its Members, and deliver for the stakeholders it serves worldwide.

89. Accordingly, the Council is invited to review the proposals contained in this document, and to formulate its recommendations thereon, for approval by the 44th Session of the Conference (28 June – 4 July 2025), in time for the 80th anniversary of the founding of FAO.

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<sup>42</sup> Article X.

<sup>43</sup> [Appendix to the WFP General Rules](#), Delegation of Authority to the Executive Director.