



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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**World Health
Organization**



GF/INF 02

Report of the Second Preparatory Meeting for the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators

German Room, FAO Headquarters, 10-11 May 2001

Introduction

This was the second preparatory meeting for the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators. The first meeting was held in FAO Headquarters on 27 February 2001 and was comprised of members of the G-8¹ countries, except Russia, and representatives of the European Community. The present meeting included G-8 members as well as invited participants from 15 countries representing all regions of the world. Also present were representatives of the European Community and of OECD. A list of participants is attached as Annex 1.

The present meeting was held at the joint invitation of FAO and WHO which were represented by Mr. Hartwig de Haen, Assistant Director-General, Economic and Social Department of FAO, and Ms. Anne Kern, Executive Director, Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments of WHO.

In their welcome, they both highlighted the importance of food safety and the increasing worldwide interest in food safety issues.

In this connection, Mr. de Haen noted that a preparatory meeting for a Pan-European Conference on Food Quality and Safety had been held the previous week on 4 May 2001, at FAO Headquarters. The Conference itself is planned to take place 25-28 February 2002 in Budapest. He also referred to the OECD/UK International Conference on New Biotechnology Food and Crops: Science, Safety and Society, which will be held 10-12 July 2001 in Bangkok. A short meeting of food safety regulators will be convened separately but in conjunction with that Conference. Mr. de Haen indicated that FAO would cooperate closely with the sponsors of the Bangkok Conference. Ms Kern highlighted the Resolution of the 53rd session of the World Health Assembly in May 2000 which established food safety as one of WHO's top priority public health functions. She noted that based on the Resolution, the development of sustainable, integrated food safety systems for the reduction of health risk throughout the entire food chain was of primary importance. She also stated that greater emphasis would be given to collaboration and coordination with international organizations, notably the FAO, and that the Global Forum provided an excellent opportunity for that.

Mr. de Haen further expressed the appreciation and thanks of both FAO and WHO to the Italian government who had generously provided the funding for this second Global Forum preparatory meeting.

The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. de Haen and Ms. Kern. The provisional agenda for the meeting (see Annex 2) was adopted without change. The Meeting also adopted an amended version of the draft report of the first preparatory meeting (see Annex 3).

¹ Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom and USA.

The main outcomes of the meeting are summarized below.

1. Concept Paper regarding the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators

The Meeting considered a Concept Paper on the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators, prepared by FAO and WHO following the first preparatory meeting. The Concept Paper was approved with minor amendments (see Annex 4).

Discussion on the Concept Paper centered on three issues:

- Possible future global fora and timing – It was considered that future global fora on food safety, following the first Forum, would probably be necessary and desirable, and that succeeding fora should be convened at “feasible and reasonable” intervals. As a practical matter, however, it was agreed that any succeeding fora should be decided at the first Global Forum. It was further agreed that, in the future, an approximate two-year interval between meetings could be suggested. The Meeting noted, however, that emerging global food safety problems or other issues could result in the need for more frequent fora, especially during the first years of this new global approach to food safety.
- Regional food safety concerns - There was general recognition that each region of the world often has specific food safety problems which are common among the countries of that region, and that the Global Forum should have a part that focuses on regional dimensions. It was suggested that countries of a specific region could possibly meet before the Global Forum, or on an ad hoc basis, during the Forum itself, and bring regional issues discussed to the attention of the Global Forum. The Meeting agreed that the Forum would be receptive to regional food safety concerns.
- Implementation of the Global Forum output – The first Global Forum is designed to be a free, frank and open discussion of food safety matters without necessarily arriving at specific conclusions. The Meeting had therefore agreed that the output of the Forum would take the form of proceedings rather than as a report with recommendations. It is expected that the Forum proceedings will identify and review many important food safety issues of regional, national and international interest, highlighting both experiences that succeeded and those that failed. The participants discussed how these could be brought forward following the Forum, to be addressed at the appropriate level. The Meeting was assured that the proceedings would be widely distributed to countries, organizations and agencies. It was noted that information from the proceedings could be brought forward by the Forum participants or others, to future meetings or fora as well as to FAO, WHO or the Codex. As an example, the Meeting was advised that the Pan-European Conference on Food Quality and Safety would have the proceedings of the Global Forum as an agenda item during their February 2002 meeting.

2. Arrangements for the First Forum

- Discussion Groups and topics – The Meeting agreed that the first Global Forum will be held over a three day period during October 2001, with plenary sessions as well as four Discussion Groups. The Meeting had agreed on a Central Theme for the first Global Forum, this being, “Improvement of efficiency and transparency in food safety systems – sharing experiences”. Four broad topics of interest were agreed upon to be considered by the Discussion Groups in the context of the Central Theme. These were: Regulatory issues; Risk management; Capacity building; and Communication and participation. Following discussions and agreement by the Meeting, the secretariat prepared a summary document outlining the Discussion Groups, their assigned topic

areas, a general statement of the proposed scope of each topic and a brief list of possible items to consider within each topic, in approximate priority order. This document is attached as Annex 5.

- Organization of sessions – The secretariat presented the Meeting with four options to organize a three-day meeting with four Discussion Groups. Two involved two Groups meeting in parallel on separate days and two involved all four Groups meeting in parallel at the same time. The Meeting decided upon the approach of two Groups meeting in parallel on separate days, for two primary reasons. Countries would be asked to provide two delegates to the Forum and this approach would permit full participation by each country in all four Discussion Groups. This approach would also be less expensive in terms of translation costs. The secretariat was tasked to provide a melding of the two options involving this approach, retaining the panel discussion from option 1 and the reporting of the Discussion Group conclusions to the plenary from option 2. The secretariat prepared a proposed provisional agenda for the Global Forum using this information.
- Forum venue and dates – The Meeting was advised that Mexico had indicated its interest to host the first Global Forum. The month of October 2001 has been established for the Forum, with the 22nd through the 24th considered to be acceptable dates.
- Forum budget – The Meeting considered a budget estimate prepared by the secretariat and was advised that this was only a preliminary estimate. The largest single expense will be travel and living expenses for developing country participants. These costs will be a function of the venue finally selected and can not be refined further at this time. The Meeting was reminded that provision of funds for the Global Forum by member countries should be made as soon as possible. In that connection the Meeting was informed by the European Community participant that the EC will provide 45,000 Euros toward funding of the Global Forum. The participant from France noted that France would also provide funds but that the exact amount was not known at present.
- Criteria of participants – The meeting agreed that the Global Forum would be a discussion fora primarily for food safety regulators, and that the optimal number of participants per country would be two. However, no maximum number was agreed. Participation from both health and agricultural sectors should be encouraged. It was agreed that organizations of interested parties and stakeholders could be invited to participate as observers. It was noted that this could imply opening the meeting to the public on the condition that individual persons would observe and not participate.



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**Annex 1
Annexe 1
Anexo 1**

Second Preparatory meeting for the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators

*German Room, FAO Headquarters
0930 hours, 10-11 May 2001*

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Annex 2

Second Preparatory Meeting for the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators

*German Room, FAO Headquarters
0930 hours, 10-11 May 2001*

Provisional Agenda

Welcoming remarks

1. Election of officers
2. Adoption of the agenda
3. Report of the first preparatory meeting
4. Proposed concept of the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators
5. Planning for the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators:
 - Proposed Central Theme and topics for the First Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators
 - Organization of sessions – proposed provisional agenda
 - Venue and Date/s
 - Participants
 - Reporting
6. Budget estimate
7. Other matters



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Annex 3

**Draft Report of the Preparatory Meeting for the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators
(Amended to reflect comments made by the USA)**

Malaysia Room, FAO Headquarters, 27 February 2001

The meeting was held in FAO Headquarters on 27 February 2001. All members of the G-8¹ were represented, except Russia. Representatives of the European Community were also present. The list of participants is attached as Annex 2.

The meeting was held at the joint invitation by FAO and WHO which were represented by Mrs. Anne Kern, Executive Director, Sustainable Development and Health Environments of WHO, and Mr. Hartwig de Haen, Assistant Director-General, Economic and Social Department of FAO. Mr. de Haen provided the participants with the meeting background in reference to the G8 Summit in Okinawa. The convenience/feasibility of holding regular global fora of food safety regulators was the main objective of the meeting.

The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Hartwig de Haen and Mrs. Anne Kern. It approved the provisional agenda (see Annex 1) without change.

The main outcome of the meeting is summarised below.

1. Proposed Concept of Global Fora of Food Safety Regulators

The Meeting reviewed document PM/02, prepared by FAO and WHO on this item. Participants concurred that the proposal to convene global fora of food safety regulators, as described in the background note, was desirable, feasible and timely.

The Meeting developed a consensus on the focus and purpose of such fora. These were defined as an exchange of information and experience acquired by countries on ways of dealing with food safety issues, methods of risk management and communication, information and rapid alert systems. The agendas of such fora should be clearly separated from activities of Codex Alimentarius; they should complement or support, but not duplicate, those of other meetings. It was further agreed that the global food safety fora would not make decisions, but exchange information, describe alternative options, share and learn from national experiences and seek mutual understanding on issues and response strategies with regard to food safety problems of common concern. While focussing on national approaches to food safety issues the fora would seek to identify a global perspective in coping with certain risks, including crisis management and prevention policies and measures.

¹ Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom and USA.

2. Preparatory Meeting for a First Global Forum

The Meeting strongly recommended that another Preparatory Meeting be organised in Italy during the second week of May 2001, with the participation of representatives of all regions of the world, with 2-4 countries per region in addition to G-8 Members, in total not more than 30 countries. This second preparatory meeting would address details of the first Global Forum including agenda, participation, papers to be prepared, budget, etc. With regard to the selection of participating countries, FAO and WHO indicated that they would request their respective Regional Groups to propose two countries per region to be invited to the Preparatory Meeting. Only government officials will be invited to this meeting.

3. Arrangements for the First Forum

- ***Venue and Date***

The Meeting recommended that the first Global Forum be held in a developing country/country in transition. It requested FAO and WHO to explore possibilities, taking into account, among other factors, international transportation convenience and suitability of meeting facilities, and to present a concrete proposal at the Preparatory Meeting.

Because of the importance of the subject matter, the Meeting recommended that the first Global Forum be held in October 2001. The exact timing would be decided at the Preparatory Meeting, in consultation with the prospective host government. The eventual host country should naturally be invited to attend the Preparatory Meeting. The Meeting took note that some of the ASEAN countries which could potentially host the Forum might not be available in the month of October due to an accumulation of other meetings in that period.

Concerning the length of the Forum, the Meeting discussed that the Global Forum might have a duration of 2 to 3 days. The details would be decided at the Preparatory Meeting taking into account the Forum agenda/content.

- ***Attendees***

The Meeting recommended that these should be senior government officials involved in food safety/food control activities and in food safety risk management from all member countries of FAO and WHO, representatives of relevant international organizations and of INGOs.

- ***Languages***

It was recommended that, at least for the first Global Forum, the six official languages of FAO and WHO (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) be used.

- ***Reporting***

The Meeting felt that a formal reporting of the Forum to another Body or Organization would not be desirable. It was suggested that a Summary Report followed by a publication of the proceedings would be appropriate.

- **Funding**

There was a general agreement that extra-budgetary support was needed to enable FAO and WHO to convene the Preparatory Meeting and the first Global Forum, and that all Members of the G-7 should contribute to this effort. The Italian Delegation indicated that Italy could consider to fund the May 2001 Preparatory Meeting. As regards the first Global Forum, FAO and WHO were asked to elaborate a revised budget estimate and to submit it to the G-7 members as soon as possible with the aim to have a commitment prior to the May 2001 meeting.

The delegation of Japan informed that Japan might find it difficult to mobilize funds if the Forum was to be held within their next budget year (April to March).

4. **First Global Forum's Themes/Topics**

The four themes proposed by FAO/WHO were discussed and found generally acceptable. They include:

- Experiences in reduction of food-borne hazards
- A global food safety emergency communications network
- Precaution in risk management
- Consumer information and participation

The Meeting agreed that the input of developing countries is vital to the development of a meaningful agenda. The Meeting agreed that the Forum is intended to complement, rather than duplicate, the work of Codex and that this must be taken into account in agenda development. It proposed that a more extensive list of potential themes should be prepared by the Secretariat as a starting point for consideration by participants at the May 2001 Preparatory Meeting. This list should include subjects/themes of interest to developing member countries. Additional potential agenda items were: interactions between food safety risk assessors and risk managers, **food** safety enforcement, emerging foodborne illnesses, new inspection models; and experiences with the implementation of Codex guidelines and standards. It was agreed that each possible agenda item should be communicated with an explanation of why it could be considered. Care should be taken to ensure that the agenda of the first Forum takes into account the concerns and interests of all countries.



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Annex 4

FAO/WHO Concept Paper Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators

Purpose: To convene, on a regular basis, Global Fora of Food Safety Regulators to promote the exchange of information on approaches and experiences in dealing with current food safety issues of potential importance to public health and international food trade to advance the process of science-based public consultations and to facilitate capacity building, particularly in developing countries.

Background: The proposed Fora would respond to the Communiqué of the Okinawa G-8 Summit which encouraged FAO and WHO “to organize periodic international meetings of food safety regulators to advance the process of science-based public consultations.”

In the international arena, the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) is, and will continue to be, the primary international body for food standard setting. It is important that the proposed fora do not duplicate Codex work and direct their attention to those issues, which would complement Codex. Capacity building of national food safety systems and programmes is one of such issues. Other issues include public perception of science-based food safety regulations, transboundary consequences of food safety emergencies, integrated approaches to food safety enhancement and coordinated resource mobilization.

FAO governing bodies, at global and regional levels, have given high priority to the work of the CAC and to FAO’s programmes and activities in the field of food quality, safety and consumer protection. They urged FAO to continue to provide the necessary technical advice and support in this field to developing countries, to enhance their capabilities in ensuring safe food supply and promoting international food trade.

The 53rd World Health Assembly (WHA) held in Geneva in May 2000 clearly demonstrates its commitment to the overarching principle that food safety is an essential public health function. The resolution adopted by the WHA calls upon both Member States and WHO to become involved in a range of multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary actions to promote the safety of food at the international, national and local levels. The need to cooperate and communicate with the agricultural sector to assure the safe production, harvest and storage of food commodities was also identified in the light of several recent episodes which have raised the perception of food safety concerns among consumers.

Participants: Regulatory authorities responsible for food safety mainly but not limited to Ministries of Health and Agriculture from FAO and WHO member countries. This will include representatives of independent food safety agencies and other ministries with responsibilities for food safety. INGOs representing industry, producer, trade and retail associations and consumer groups would play a useful role in discussing certain issues and should therefore be involved.

Partners: The Fora would be held jointly between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization. Other international organizations, *including* OECD, OIE,

UNEP, UNICEF, UNIDO, WTO, the World Bank and other development agencies would be invited to participate as observers.

Description: The Fora would be structured as 3-4 day meetings with plenary sessions, workshops, working groups, group discussions as appropriate, to address, under a central theme, specific topics, balanced to include the interests and views of both developed and developing countries. It would provide the possibility for country groupings or regions to identify and address regional concerns.

Reporting: The Forum is not expected to report to either FAO or WHO or to governments; FAO and WHO will instead issue a summary report and arrange for the publication of the proceedings. However, governments and international organizations would be encouraged to make full use of the proceedings in promoting food safety.

Budget: The budget for the organization of the first Forum should include costs of preparing the necessary documentation in the official languages of both FAO and WHO as well as the cost for the actual convening of the Forum (meeting room cost, interpretation cost, logistics cost). It should also include support to the participation of delegates from developing countries.



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Annex 5

Global Forum Discussion Groups

The Central Theme of the First Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators is:
“Improvement of efficiency and transparency in food safety systems – sharing experiences”

The four Forum Discussion Groups are listed below with the topics they are to consider within the framework of the Central Theme:

Discussion Group 1 - Regulatory Issues

Scope: How national regulatory agencies have responded to both national and transboundary food safety emergencies. An exchange of national experiences in ensuring compliance with food safety regulations including both successes and failures. The impact of new approaches and techniques on food safety regulations and national enforcement policy.

- National and transboundary food safety emergencies
- Ensuring compliance with food safety regulations, including implementation of Codex standards and guidelines
- New inspection approaches and techniques – implications for food safety regulations

Discussion Group 2 - Risk Management

Scope: Sharing of national experiences in the overall area of risk management in food safety to include the identification and reduction of food risks especially emerging hazards. A discussion of the management of food risks from field to table including experiences in the use of the precaution principle as well as the effect of economic considerations. The role of industry and the consumer in risk management, as well as the practicalities of interactions between food safety risk assessors and risk managers.

- The reduction of food-borne hazards, including microbiological and others, with emphasis on emerging hazards
- Integrated approaches to the management of food safety throughout the food chain, including the role of industry and consumers
- Economic and practical considerations in food safety risk management

Discussion Group 3 - Capacity Building

Scope: Capacity building including institutional building – successes and failures as viewed by both developed and developing countries. The role of technical assistance. The consideration of new approaches.

- Capacity building needs and priorities
- Technical assistance to developing countries – experiences and lessons learned
- New approaches to consider to capacity building and technical assistance – building alliances

Discussion Group 4 - *Communication and Participation*

Scope: An exchange of experiences on what has been used and what is needed to effectively communicate to all interested parties during a food safety emergency. Also, routine communication procedures and needs to disseminate information to consumers and others concerning on-going food safety activities (new regulations, identification of food risks, etc.). National experiences in disseminating food safety information to consumers and their participation in the management process.

- Communication needs in food safety emergencies, to include information systems (regulatory and rapid alert) at both national and international levels
- Communicating food safety regulations and risk management including practical approaches to communication with, and participation by, consumers and other stakeholders
- Ensuring efficient communication and interaction between food safety risk assessors and risk managers