

## 165th Session of the Council

### **Report of the Sixth Informal Regional Conference for North America (22- 23 October 2020)**

It is our pleasure and honor to present the Report of the 6th Informal Regional Conference for North America held on 22 and 23 October 2020.

The Informal Regional Conference for North America (iNARC) was established in 2010 as a forum for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the North American Region (United States and Canada) to strengthen collaboration between the Region's Members and the Organization. Though informal in its format, as distinct from other Regional Conferences, we consider the priorities detailed in the 2020 iNARC Report to be a formal declaration of the North American Region's views regarding the FAO's strategic programming. Canada and the United States expect these views be given equal consideration to the reports of other Regional Conferences in FAO's budgetary and operational planning and reporting. Through the iNARC meetings, we have sought to express the North American Region's views on FAO's work and activities globally, as well as our Region's views on effective institutional governance.

The 6th iNARC, hosted by Canada, was held virtually and in two main parts, after the originally planned in-person Conference was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The North America Region held a series of pre-briefings and discussions with FAO on 22 and 23 September 2020, followed by the iNARC plenary Session on 22 and 23 October 2020. Representatives from Canada and the United States participated in the Regional Conference alongside officials from FAO and FAO's Liaison Office in Washington (FALOW).

This year's iNARC opened with commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of FAO's first Conference, held in Québec City, Canada, in 1945. Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Marie-Claude Bibeau, United States Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue, FAO Director-General, Dr. Qu Dongyu, and Québec Minister of International Relations and the Francophonie, Nadine Girault, each delivered remarks. All speakers addressed the critical role the North American Region has played in FAO's creation and highlighted the seminal work done by FAO over the last seven and a half decades to reduce global hunger and malnutrition.

Minister Bibeau identified the need for innovation, international trade and inclusive food systems as prerequisites to addressing global hunger.

Secretary Perdue spoke about the need for a digital FAO, stressing that FAO should continue to adapt to, and address, the challenges of today and the future.

FAO Director General, Dr. Qu Dongyu, highlighted that hunger was a direct and powerful constraint for economic and social development of many poor and developing countries and it was necessary for the international community to come together, in solidarity, to meet this challenge.

The anniversary commemoration was followed by a two-day iNARC plenary which started with a high-level segment addressed by the co-Chairpersons from Canada and the United States, Assistant Deputy Minister, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Frédéric Seppey and Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ted McKinney. The FAO Director-General provided opening remarks addressing the delegates on a multitude of topics including the recent steps FAO has taken to respond to Covid-19 and to increase transparency. The Director-General concluded his remarks by explaining the need for efficient reform of FAO's structure and governance to make the Organization more agile and responsive. Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to FAO, Alexandra Bugailiskis, Assistant Deputy Minister, Global Affairs Canada, Peter MacDougall, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the

United States to the United Nations Agencies in Rome, Kip Tom, and Assistant to the Administrator for Resilience and Food Security, USAID, Jim Barnhart, also addressed the delegates.

The High-Level segment was followed by a presentation by the United States and Canada on the summary of deliberations at the pre-iNARC Session held on 22 and 23 September 2020. This was followed by a presentation by Beth Crawford, Director of the Office of Strategy, Planning and Resources Management (OSP) of FAO of the Action Taken Report on the priorities identified in the 5th iNARC in 2018 and their integration into FAO's Programme of Work and Budget (PWB). A presentation on FAOLOW's activities on the identified priorities was made by the Director, FAOLOW.

The Conference deliberated at length on FAO's next Strategic Framework and iNARC 2020 priorities and its inclusion in FAO's PWB.

Based on discussions during pre-iNARC briefings and the 6th iNARC plenary, a set of concrete priorities were identified for FAO's 2022-2031 Strategic Framework and PWB, including global and in-country actions, including the following five key strategic recommendations:

- a) FAO should pursue an inclusive innovation agenda that promotes scientific, digital, technological, and other innovations that contribute to fostering environmental, social, and economic sustainability;
- b) FAO adds most value when delivering the critical functions of its core mandate: normative and standard-setting work, scientific, evidence-based, and impartial analysis and serving as a knowledge aggregator;
- c) FAO will best build resilience to persistent and emerging threats by focusing on timely, science and evidence-based responses and highlighting the importance of global supply chains and international trade;
- d) FAO will be most effective by systematically adopting gender-responsive approaches, including those that tackle underlying social norms, attitudes, behaviors and social systems perpetuating gender inequalities and increasing its focus on engaging women, youth, and indigenous peoples; and
- e) to meet the global challenges and emerging threats before it, FAO must optimize its comparative advantage by leveraging partnerships with the private sector, civil society, the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs), and other international organizations.

Under these five strategic recommendations a total of 34 priorities have been identified. These strategic recommendations and priorities are presented in Annex C of the 2020 iNARC Report. FAO should consider these recommendations and priorities for inclusion in FAO's work strategy going forward.

A full and dedicated report on the 6th iNARC has been submitted to the 165th Session of the FAO Council for its consideration and information. We look forward to continuing our Region's robust partnership with FAO, including in working together to address the priorities identified in the 6th iNARC.

*Mr. Frédéric Seppey, Assistant Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and*

*Mr. Ted McKinney, U.S. Undersecretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs, Co-Chairs of the 6<sup>th</sup> Informal Regional Conference for North America (iNARC)*