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Продовольственная и  
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Organización de las  
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منظمة  
الغذية والزراعة  
للأمم المتحدة

## COUNCIL

### Hundred and Seventy-seventh 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

Proposals were made with the purpose of inviting Members to initiate consideration and discussion among Members for measures for institutional renewal of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), coinciding with the 80th anniversary of FAO's 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 proposals – complementing the transformations introduced since 2019 aimed at a more efficient, modern and dynamic Organization – drew upon views expressed by Members in the Governing Bodies over the past years with the intention of providing a springboard for discussion among Members. This document aims to facilitate discussions among Members, and their decision-making, on possible constitutional and governance measures.

#### Suggested action by the Council

The Council is invited to consider and deliberate upon 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

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## I. Introduction

1. Actions for institutional renewal of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) 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.
2. Proposals were made with a view to inviting Members to initiate consideration and discussion among Members for measures for institutional renewal, coinciding with the 80th anniversary of FAO's 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 proposals drew upon views expressed by Members in the Governing Bodies over the past years, aiming to provide a springboard for discussion among Members.
3. The present document aims to facilitate discussions among Members and their decision-making, drawing upon document CL 176/12, taking into account views expressed by Members on the proposals set out in that document.

## II. Background

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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).
9. Proposals for renewal led by past Directors-General have touched on many fundamental aspects of the Organization with a view to responding to 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. The proposals set out in this document 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 28-33);
  - ii. Independent Chairperson of the Council – enhance clarity and strengthen the independence of that role, while building trust through transparency (paragraphs 34-42);
  - 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 43-50).

16. If adopted by Members, these proposals would have a zero net financial impact on the budget of the Organization.

#### 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

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

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. 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>5</sup>

23. 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:

<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> 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).

<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).

24. 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.”*

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

## VI. Governance

26. 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>6</sup> of 2007.

27. 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.

<sup>6</sup> [C 2007/7A.1-Rev.1.](#)

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

28. 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>7</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.

29. The composition of the Council was last adjusted in 1977, when there were 144 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>8</sup>

30. The Council’s recommendations at its 71st Session in 1977, subsequently endorsed by the Conference,<sup>9</sup> were the outcome of negotiations and did not follow a strictly numerical formula. They resulted in the current Council composition:

Region	Member Nations	Council seats
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>

31. 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>10</sup>

32. 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>11</sup>

33. 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

<sup>7</sup> [C 1947/REP](#).

<sup>8</sup> [CL 71/REP](#), paragraphs 208-11.

<sup>9</sup> [Conference resolution 16/77](#), adopted at its 19th Session.

<sup>10</sup> [C 2015/REP, paragraph 74, and paragraph 3 of Resolution 7/2015](#), regarding IPA Action 4.4.

<sup>11</sup> [C 2023/REP](#), paragraph 68; [C 2023/PV](#), page 245; [CL 175/REP](#), paragraph 27.

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

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

34. When establishing the Council in 1947, the Conference also created the office of the Independent Chairperson of the Council.<sup>12</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>13</sup>*

35. 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.

36. 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>14</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.

37. 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.

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

39. 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>15</sup>

<sup>12</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>13</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>14</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>15</sup> Annex XI to the [Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly](#), document [A/520/Rev.20](#).



40. 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>16</sup> Such efforts could reinforce the governance architecture adopted by Members through the IPA.<sup>17</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 recommendations which have programmatic, financial or constitutional implications for the Organization, requiring the Council to make recommendations to the Conference.

41. 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>18</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”.

42. 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*

43. 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.

44. The Rules of Procedure adopted by the Council at its first session in 1947<sup>19</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>20</sup>

45. 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.

46. 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.

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<sup>16</sup> The Regional Conferences, the Committee on Commodity Problems, the Committee on Fisheries, the Committee on Forestry and the Committee on Agriculture.

<sup>17</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.

<sup>18</sup> Preambular paragraph of [Resolution 9/2009](#); Section E, Volume II, [Basic Texts \(2017\)](#).

<sup>19</sup> [CL 1/REP, Annex III](#).

<sup>20</sup> Rule I; Officers of the Council.

47. 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.

48. 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.

49. 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

50. 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.

## **VII. Conclusions**

51. 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. Building on views expressed by Members in the past and complementing the transformations that have been approved by the Members since 2019, the proposals aim to assist Members in their discussions aimed at making the Organization more fit for purpose to deliver its mandate.

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