

166th Session of the Council
Written Correspondence Procedure – inputs from Members - English version
Item 13 - Arrangements for the 42nd Session of the Conference

Member Name	Comments
<p style="text-align: center;">Dominican Republic – Member (Wed 14/04/2021 16:00)</p>	<p>The Dominican Republic welcomes document CL 166/13 and the proposals to the Council contained therein, regarding arrangements and preparations for the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference.</p> <p>We are in favour of the 42nd Session of the Conference being held virtually on 14-18 June 2021.</p> <p>We support the proposal on alternative modalities for holding elections virtually, on an exceptional basis, in view of the circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the revised deadlines for the receipt of nominations for the election of Council Members.</p> <p>We endorse the proposed topic of “Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action” as the Biennial Theme for 2022-23.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The United States of America (Wed 14/04/2021 16:56)</p>	<p>The United States strongly prefers option II, in-person vote by secret ballot by appointment, allowing for alternate voting stations at strategic FAO Liaison Offices, and allowing for designated proxy voters, with a limit to how many proxies one person may be permitted to accept.</p> <p>The United States does not feel comfortable given the timeline that a secure and independent digital platform could be purchased, established, and vetted in time for voting. The United States is invested in maintaining the integrity of the voting process.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Argentina – Member (Wed 14/04/2021 16:58)</p>	<p>Argentina supports the proposal to hold the 42nd Conference Session from 14 to 18 June 2021, instead of 12 to 16 July 2021, as originally decided by the Conference at its 41st Session in July 2019 and calls on other Members of the Council to do the same. We agree that this change will make it easier for all Members to participate in what will be a very tight schedule of high-level intergovernmental meetings and also provide the Conference with an opportunity to provide meaningful input to the Pre-Summit gathering for the Food Systems Summit.</p> <p>Apart from the timing of the Conference, Argentina fully agrees that the Conference Session should be held virtually using the Zoom videoconferencing platform due to the limitations arising from the COVID-19 pandemic including, inter alia, restrictions on international travel and large physical meetings to contain the spread of COVID-19. This is all taking place against the backdrop of the uneven distribution of COVID-19 vaccines around the world, which, in the words of the head of the World Health Organization (WHO) is becoming “grotesque”. The decision to hold the FAO Conference virtually should also be interpreted as a call for greater solidarity among Members.</p> <p>Regarding the three options for alternative voting arrangements for consideration by Council, Argentina thanks FAO for organizing this and would favour the option of an online, electronic secret ballot conducted through external software, on an exceptional basis, in view of the circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>

	<p>With regard to the topic for the General Debate at the Conference, Argentina agrees with the proposals set out in the document. We reiterate what we have stated on several occasions, i.e. that the focus should be on promoting and strengthening the three dimensions of sustainable food systems: economic, social and environmental. The degree of transformation will therefore depend on the stage each system has achieved, which means that no generalizations can be made. The need for “transformation” arises out of an analysis of the context and will also depend on national priorities and capacities.</p> <p>Similarly, if we employ slogans such as “we need to change everything or transform everything”, we could fall into the trap of changing everything so that nothing changes. The language must therefore be more precise and appropriate, and consider the specificities of each case, otherwise the idea of radically transforming systems could simply become an empty slogan.</p> <p>Argentina would therefore prefer that the general topic of the debate (and the theme for the 2022-23 biennium) should address issues of importance to the membership as a whole and be in line with the 2030 Agenda, which continues to be the guiding pillar of work done by the international community and FAO. We therefore consider it important that the topic should comply with these objectives and foster them, since they have yet to be fully achieved and much work remains to be done. Argentina therefore proposes that the general topic for discussion should read: “Sustainable Agricultural and Food Systems: From Strategy to Action”. We believe that this title is more inclusive, in line with SDG 2.4, and consistent with the way in which the reports by the various FAO Committees have addressed the issue of “transformation”, and highlights sustainability as the ultimate goal of all work done by FAO and its Members.</p> <p>The same comments and suggestions would apply to the biennial theme, given that the “Agriculture Food Systems Transformation” should not be considered an end in itself, because not all agriculture food systems should be transformed – only those that are unsustainable, as stated above.</p> <p>However, if there is no scope for addressing possible alternative proposals for the topic of the General Debate and the theme for the biennium, we would like to adjust the original proposal to reflect discussions on the issue of possible “transformations” of agriculture food systems that have already taken place in the Organization, including at the last Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committees, where it was reiterated that calls to transform such systems should be encouraged “in a coherent manner, as appropriate, according to and dependent on, national contexts and capacities” (section 9.h of document CL 166/8).</p> <p>Having made these comments, Argentina looks forward to hearing the comments of other Members and responses from the FAO Secretariat in order to reach consensus on the arrangements and the topic for the General Debate at the next FAO Conference, as well as on the biennial theme for 2022-2023.</p>
<p>Brazil – Member (Wed 14/04/2021 16:58)</p>	<p>On dates and modalities, Brazil supports that the 42nd session of the Conference be convened virtually from 14 to 18 June 2021.</p> <p>On the special procedures for voting during the 42nd session of the Conference, Brazil suggests it is done either by an online, electronic secret ballot conducted through external software, or an in-person vote by secret ballot by appointment.</p>

	<p>On the proposed theme for the General Debate of the Conference and for the next biennium ("Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action"), Brazil notes that "Agriculture Food Systems" is an unclear and non-agreed concept. Moreover, in previous occasions many delegations have expressed disagreement with the expression "transformation of food systems" since it conveys the misleading idea that all food systems are malfunctioning now and should be radically changed. Taking this into account, Brazil proposes the following alternative language: "Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems: From Strategy to Action".</p>
<p>Australia – Member (Wed 14/04/2021 17:09)</p>	<p>Australia extends our appreciation to the FAO for the efforts which have been made to facilitate the 42nd Conference during the COVID-19 pandemic. Australia notes and welcomes the information presented in CL166/13 and provides the following comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australia is happy to endorse the revision to the date, and we understand the exceptional circumstances which mean that the 42nd Conference will occur in a virtual modality. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ While we appreciate that virtual arrangements are the most inclusive way to conduct business in light of on-going pandemic restrictions, we highlight the importance of virtual arrangements remaining the exception and the need to return to in-person meetings as soon as conditions allow. ○ We also understand the need to hold virtual meetings in line with Central European Time; however, we flag the on-going challenge this timing poses to fulsome participation by South West Pacific countries. ○ We welcome the option for delegations to provide their statements for the General Debate in writing or via video. • With regard to the voting arrangements, Australia remains amenable to any of the options presented providing reasonable assurance can be provided about the integrity, confidentiality, inclusivity and transparency of the vote being maintained. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We welcome advice that these arrangements are being considered on an exceptional basis. ○ We would appreciate advice on whether the FAO intends to make direct approaches to all Members to ensure suitability of the preferred voting procedure in response to the guidance received by Council. ○ We recommend that detailed guidance on the voting procedure be provided to all Members ahead of the Conference to avoid any confusion, in particular around the use of proxy votes where applicable.
<p>Peru – Member (Wed 14/04/2021 23:10)</p>	<p>Peru agrees that the 42nd Session of the Conference should be held from 14 to 18 June 2021 in virtual modality. Regarding point B. Change of Dates and Modality of the Conference, we agree with the Special Procedures that will be applied on an exceptional basis for the Conference Session to be held in virtual modality (Appendix A). The same applies to the proposed deadline for receipt of nominations for Council Membership for the periods 2021-2024 and 2022-2025, and the Provisional Timetable for the 42nd Session of the Conference (Appendix C). For point F. Topic for the General Debate, section 19, we agree that the 166th Session of the Council should consider "<i>Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action</i>" as a proposed topic for the General Debate at the 42nd Session of the Conference under item 9, "Review of the State of Food and Agriculture".</p>

	<p>Similarly, under point G. Biennial Theme, section 16, we ask the Council to consider endorsing the following proposed theme: “<i>Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action</i>”.</p> <p>In this regard, while recognizing that food patterns have undergone rapid transformation in recent decades, it is also pertinent to acknowledge that the “transformation” of agriculture food systems is affected by each country’s <i>context</i> and, therefore, not all agriculture food systems require transformation. Therefore, members who decide to do so can promote any <i>potential</i> agriculture food system transformation processes depending on their national contexts, priorities and capacities.</p> <p>For these reasons, in order to avoid taking a blanket approach, we suggest that the term “transformation” be removed from the proposed theme or amended, and we suggest the following alternative wording. “<i>Improving Agriculture Food Systems: From Strategy to Action</i>” or “<i>Strengthening Agriculture Food Systems: From Strategy to Action</i>”.</p>
<p>Canada – Member (Wed 14/04/2021 22:27)</p>	<p>Canada supports holding the 42nd Session of the Conference from 14-18 June 2021 in virtual modality.</p> <p>On the alternative voting procedure for secret ballot elections at the 42nd Session of the Conference, Canada prefers an in-person vote by secret ballot by appointment.</p>
<p>Japan – Member (Thu 15/04/2021 14:32)</p>	<p>Revised dates and virtual modality of the Conference Session are acceptable for Japan. Nonetheless, we would cordially request the appropriate arrangement of meeting time in consideration of the time difference. We would also like to assure synergies between the Conference Session and the UN Food Systems Summit and Pre-Summit.</p> <p>Japan believes physical voting ("Option 1") is desirable and should be pursued as much as possible. However, given the perceived legal challenges of proxy voting and the procedural complexity of physical voting in several locations, including New York and Geneva, Japan is flexible to take the online voting option ("Option 2") if all the technical and procedural concerns are properly addressed and the principles of transparency, equal access, and confidentiality are ensured.</p>
<p>European Union – Member (Mon 19/04/2021 11:56)</p>	<p>I am honoured to write to you on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member States regarding the abovementioned agenda item for the 166th Session of the FAO Council.</p> <p>Considering the exceptional circumstances created by the measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU and its Member States have no fundamental objection to the 42nd Session of the Conference being held in a virtual format.</p> <p>In any case, it should be underlined that any suspension of the General Rules of the Organization and special procedures implemented at the 42nd Session of the Conference are to be implemented on an exceptional basis and without creating a precedent for any of its future sessions.</p> <p>We also believe that this 42nd Session of the Conference should be taken as an opportunity to agree on a meaningful Code of Conduct for Voting within FAO aligned in line with best practices and standards in the UN system.</p> <p>Regarding the secret ballot elections, various options are proposed and the proposed option to conduct an online, electronic secret ballot using external software, an option that is not provided for in the FAO’s basic texts and for which</p>

	<p>there is no precedent in the UN system, we have additional questions, to which we would be grateful to receive detailed answers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would secrecy of voting be ensured? • How would the system certification required for online voting using external software be conducted? Moreover, what standards would be used for that system certification? • What measures would be taken to prevent and eliminate the risk of manipulation by hackers from outside? • How would a recount be conducted, if required? • At what stage before the election would the code of the external software to be used for the electronic secret ballot be available for public scrutiny? • How would the legal certainty of the election be ensured if there were to be a legal challenge? <p>We welcome the topic proposed for the general debate at the 42nd Session of the Conference: ‘Agriculture and Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action’. We hope that the debate can provide significant insightful input to the UN Food Systems Summit and Pre-Summit, fulfilling the FAO’s responsibilities regarding its central role in key areas related to food systems.</p> <p>Finally, we support the choice of ‘Agriculture and Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action’ as the theme for the 2022-2023 biennium.</p>
<p>Switzerland – Observer (Wed 14/04/2021 15:52)</p>	<p>Switzerland welcomes document CL 166/13 that gives an overview on the arrangements for the 42nd Session of the Conference and would like to comment on part F. Topic for the General Debate (specifically on Para 19) and part G. Biennial Theme (specifically on Para 23).</p> <p>Switzerland fully supports “Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action” as theme for the General Debate at the 42nd Session of the Conference and as biennial theme for the 2022-23 biennium.</p> <p>The theme increases the focus of the 42nd Session of the Conference and the Governing Bodies on the priorities and strategic global issues contained in the Strategic Framework where the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems is at the heart of all strategic actions.</p> <p>The theme equally relates to the UN Food Systems Summit 2021 that places the transformation of food systems centre-stage in order to significantly accelerate progress towards the achievement of Agenda 2030. Switzerland understands this topic as a determination to transform and change the way our food is produced and consumed today in order to accelerate the shift towards more sustainable and resilient food systems and reminds that transformation of food systems will be achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • through a systemic and holistic approach that takes into account all socioeconomic and environmental aspects; • by working in multi-stakeholder partnerships, as challenges are complex and systemic and cannot be dealt with in a top-down and linear way; • by promoting all innovations especially co-creation of knowledge, farmer-to-farmer innovations and prioritising systemic approaches such as Agroecology; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by putting young people as key agents of change in the transformation towards sustainable food systems at the centre of actions. <p>Switzerland calls on FAO to fully play its key role in promoting this transformational change, through the promotion of networks, strengthening its science and evidence-based work and by supporting the development of metrics. FAO's normative competence should be further strengthened.</p>
<p>Colombia – Observer (19 April 2021 13:38)</p>	<p>Colombia is in favour of holding the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference from 14 to 18 June 2021. Regarding item 13 – Arrangements for the 42nd Session of the Conference, we propose that, in line with the topics that we have sought to address as a region, the following theme be considered as a topic for the General Debate at the Conference: "the recovery and transformation of agri-food systems affected by the COVID-19 pandemic". The proposed theme would cover:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Country experience at global level; b) FAO recommendations for economic recovery and revival in rural, environmental and social sectors; and c) Action plan for partners to contribute to the transformation of agri-food systems affected by the pandemic.