

166th Session of the Council

Arrangements for the 42nd Session of the Conference

Secretariat response to written inputs from the Council

The Secretariat notes the positive response from Members with regard to the proposal to convene the 42nd Session of the Conference from 14-18 June 2021, in virtual modality. Accordingly, the Council-recommended deadline for receipt of nominations for the election of Council Members will be adjusted to 12:00 hours on Monday, 14 June 2021, and the election to be held on Thursday, 17 June 2021. The Secretariat notes that the virtual arrangements are implemented on an exceptional basis.

The special procedures to be applied on an exceptional basis at the 42nd Session of the Conference held in virtual modality, outlined in *Appendix A* of document CL 166/13, shall serve to ensure the time management and smooth functioning of the Session. The hosting of the Session on the Zoom videoconferencing platform shall benefit from the experience of using this platform by both Members and the Secretariat for most Governing Body Sessions since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the use of the written correspondence procedure for 5 Agenda Items and 5 sub-items aims to ensure the Session concludes its Agenda in the time allotted, in particular in light of the scheduling of Commission meetings of the Conference consecutively, to the extent possible.

With regard to the Timetable and the time zone of the 42nd Session of the Conference, this will be Central European Time (GMT +1) or Central European Summer Time (UTC +2), as this is the time zone of the headquarters of the Organization and the location of the meeting if it was held physically. While the Secretariat acknowledges and regrets the difficulty caused by the time difference for some delegations, it is considered necessary to maintain the time zone of FAO headquarters so as to ensure neutrality as well as allow the work of the Conference to be concluded in the 5 days scheduled for the Session.

With regard to voting procedures, the Secretariat notes the comments of Australia and assures that all Members will be provided with detailed guidance on the voting procedure to be implemented at the 42nd Session of the Conference.

With regard to the questions of the European Union, the Secretariat is pleased to clarify the following:

The voting platform selected for the Conference (Onesait Democracy Elections Assemblies (ODEA), from Minsait¹) offers a Full Secret Voting mode, with the use of an industry standard encryption algorithm for ensuring the privacy preservation of the cloud data.

The voting platform ODEA has received several certifications, recently from IFAD, through a third part company, Verizone. Minsait has certifications on security methodologies (27001, 9001, etc).

All actions are recorded on a blockchain that is cryptographically protected. Any manipulation from hackers would be immediately detected and the original data can therefore be restored.

If required, an administrator can request the system to go back to recount state. Recount is possible for both open vote and full secret voting modes.

The code is protected by copyright and is not open to public scrutiny. Minsait can give full access to the code to auditors nominated by the customer. Publishing the code will only facilitate potential hackers.

¹ <http://www.minsait.com/en/industries/elections-and-participatory-processes>

With regard to challenges to secret ballots, these are provided for in Rule XII 15 (d) and (e) of the General Rules of the Organization, and are applicable to all secret ballots, including elections.

“(d) A secret ballot may be challenged at any time within three months of the date upon which it took place or until the elected candidate takes office, whichever is the longer period.

(e) Should a vote or election by secret ballot be challenged, the Director-General shall cause the ballot papers and all relevant record sheets to be re-examined and shall circulate the result of the investigation, together with the original complaint, to all Member Nations of the Organization or of the Council, as appropriate.”

A secret ballot would be open to challenge for a period of three months, or until an elected official takes office, whichever is the longer period. A challenge itself would neither invalidate nor suspend the result of a secret ballot.

An investigation would be possible in the online voting system. Minsait has a Blockchain based audit log that ensures every transaction is recorded. It allows the auditing of the source code and verification at any given moment that the code being executed is the audited one, thus ensuring the possibility of an investigation.

With regard to the theme for the General Debate and the Biennial Theme, the FAO Secretariat would like to maintain the theme with the proposed title to read: “Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action”, with the following arguments for Members’ consideration. The word *Transformation* is not an absolute term but a term that draws attention to and calls for urgency, therefore used in a specific context such as the one we are facing today. The word *Transformation* is used for “Food Systems”. We use Food Systems in plural terms in order to refer to all the systems, among which some might need to be transformed to achieve SDG 1 and SDG 2. *Food Systems Transformation* does not suggest a change in or transformation of each individual food system, but is an overall concept to look at all Food Systems, among which some would require transformation for the desired results to be achieved, and it is used to stress the importance and urgency of the matter.

The FAO Secretariat fully agrees that not each food system requires transformation but as a knowledge Organization, we are drawing attention to its importance, and we have suggested that Food Systems be used in plural terms. By using Food Systems in plural terms, FAO is taking a holistic and global approach.

The FAO Secretariat would suggest to maintain the term Agriculture Food Systems, because of the vision and mandate of the Organization which goes beyond food and includes all agricultural activities. Agriculture encompasses activities that are not necessarily food related, therefore the FAO Secretariat strongly believes that FAO, as knowledge Organization and a specialized agency, could suggest a term that would reflect its mandate. More importantly, the term agri-food Systems or Agriculture Food Systems is consistent with the Organization’s Strategic Framework and its priority areas of work.