

Checked against delivery

**Statement delivered by
Mr Lieven De La Marche, Special Advisor, Permanent representative designated
on the occasion of the
43rd Session of the FAO Conference (1-7 July 2023)
3 July 2023**

Director General,
Madam Chair,
Ministers and Secretaries of State,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Belgium aligns itself with the Joint Statement delivered by Spain on behalf of the EU and its 27 Member States.

Belgium welcomes the central theme of the 43rd FAO Conference. We acknowledge that water is the livelihood of the earth and our common denominator. Water underpins in particular SDG 6, but, moreover, is a connecting and determining element in the achievement of the entire 2030 Agenda. Problems related to water require interconnected and intelligent solutions.

Agriculture demands alone account for some 70 percent of water usage. Adding to the pressure, more than 90 percent of disasters are water-related, with climate change hitting hardest through water. Climate change means that numerous places will either have no water, erratic access to water, or far too much water. As other countries, Belgium, is confronted with both flooding's and water scarcity. Two years ago, extreme rain fall hit the Walloon region of Belgium very badly, with a heavy human toll. At the same time, drought is a problem for our industry and agriculture sector, especially in the densely populated region of Flanders.

We need a new approach to water management. Therefore, Belgium launched its "Blue Deal" that will bring a systemic shift in our policymaking by implementing a comprehensive plan with specific actions and investment opportunities.

Wishing to bridge the local and international level, Belgium is keen on sharing its expertise and best practices. Belgium and its different regions remain engaged in sharing innovative solutions for water management problems, and in spreading our knowledge and best practices through financial programs and local capacity building. Belgium will target water-related challenges in the fields of health, agriculture, climate resilience and providing clean water and sanitation systems to local communities, in particular the most vulnerable ones. In addition, Belgium will further contribute to the rollout of global early warning systems and assist communities in ensuring preparedness and rapid response to natural disasters.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A transformation to more sustainable food systems is a priority of the Belgian Development Cooperation. Belgium hereby focuses on ecological, social and economic sustainability; by promoting more sustainable practices such as agro-ecology, prioritizing local value chains and local "territorial" markets, promoting

sustainable use of natural resources, including water, and more effective use of ecosystem services is essential in the light of Climate Change.

Strong agricultural, food and water governance and effective global frameworks are key to supporting the transition towards sustainable and resilient food systems and to overcome water challenges in agriculture. Belgium welcomes the commitment of FAO in this regard, as a key player in sustainable water management, to look for ways to produce more food with less water while protecting the environment and building resilience in populations possibly affected by floods and droughts. We need to reinforce the right to water as a fundamental human right and reduce the pressures on the hydrological system, and to develop new, alternative food systems to reduce the unsustainable use of water in food production and agriculture.

Belgium was actively engaged in the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York and is committed to its Water Action Agenda. The challenges the world is facing, underscores how important multilateral cooperation is as a means to find solutions. We therefore need a strong FAO, implementing the new fit-for-purpose FAO Strategy on Climate Change, in order to succeed in the fight against hunger, in transforming food systems to be far more sustainable and in overcoming water challenges in agriculture.

To conclude, Belgium wants to congratulate Director-General Qu Dongyu for his reelection. FAO is a longstanding and important partner for Belgium. There are many areas where Belgium's and FAO's development visions of its strategic framework align. For many years, Belgium has chosen the modalities that allow FAO to work in the most efficient way possible: multi-year commitment in the form of unrestricted voluntary contributions through the Flexible Voluntary Fund (FVC) and contributions to the FAO Special Fund for Emergency Activities (SFERA), to enable FAO to respond with enormous flexibility and speed to humanitarian crises.

Finally, let me affirm Belgium's commitment to FAO's work and our willingness to cooperate actively for an increasingly sustainable future. I wish everyone the best for this Conference.

Thank you.