

Statement delivered by
Her Excellency Elizabeth Nasskau
Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to FAO
on the occasion of the 43rd Session of the FAO Conference (1-7 July 2023)
5 July 2023

Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon to all. Excellencies. Distinguished delegates. Ladies and Gentlemen.

With record numbers of people acutely hungry in the world, SDG2 on zero hunger is further and further off-track. Progress is in reverse, with conflict and climate change driving food insecurity globally. This is exacerbated by the Russian Federation's illegal war in Ukraine that directly impacts food security, and therefore the work of FAO - and the other Rome-based agencies. The UK joins others in calling on the Russian Federation to end the war.

In this context, FAO's State of Food and Agriculture report, with its focus on water security – interlinked with food security and climate change – is of critical importance. Dependent on water are the ecosystems on which food security relies, proper sanitation and hygiene, and all life on earth.

But the world has mismanaged this precious resource for too long, and now we are faced with a global water security crisis, exacerbated by climate change. The impacts of El Niño this year will be devastating, especially for the most vulnerable. Whilst this is a daunting picture, if we act now, and we act smart we can drive forward a water secure world that protects people, planet, and nature. But we must act together. As the global commission on the economics of water puts it – water is our greatest global common good.

As the largest user of freshwater supplies, the food and agriculture sector has a huge role to play. There is an imperative now to improve the sustainability of water use in agriculture. For this, we will need innovative solutions, new technologies, better data and more transparency, increased finances in blue and green infrastructure, and of course increased political leadership to deliver this.

But when we talk of water security, we often think of blue water – the water found in lakes, rivers, and reservoirs. But not enough global attention has been put on *green* water - the water captured and stored in our soils for plants. We encourage FAO to increase the focus on green water. Without this there can be no replenishment of groundwater, which will impact the whole water cycle including precipitation levels, with knock on ramifications both within and beyond the agricultural sector.

We invite FAO to join the Glasgow Fairwater Footprint Declaration, a multistakeholder initiative committed to raising standards of water management in supply chains, including for food. Driving forward a water secure world is at the heart of the UK's work on climate adaptation. We encourage FAO in continuing to strengthen its focus on and integration of water across all of its work. Following on from the UN Water Conference in March, FAO is uniquely placed to drive forward this agenda, for a water secure world, better able to adapt and respond to the consequences of climate change. We also call on FAO to collaborate and engage with the Rome-based and other UN Agencies focussed on food systems and food security, to better integrate sustainable water resource management across the water-food nexus.

Water resource management is also essential for the delivery of all the SDGs, including SDG 3 on good health and wellbeing. As co-chair of the water and health dialogue at the UN water conference, the United Kingdom highlighted the critical role that water, sanitation and hygiene have - also on combatting the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance. As Lord Benyon, the UK Minister of State in our Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, highlighted in today's side-event, implementation of a One Health approach is becoming increasingly important, and we are committed to taking this forward, also

through knowledge sharing and the UK's FAO Reference Centre. The UK has a high level of ambition for action across the One Health spectrum. We look forward to further strengthening our collaboration with other Member States and partners, including FAO and the Quadripartite – particularly in the lead-up to next year's UN General Assembly High-Level meeting on AMR.

Finally, the UK would like to congratulate Dr Qu Dongyu once more on his re-election as Director-General of FAO. In a context in which the world is facing unprecedented, interconnected challenges on global food security, nutrition, climate change, water scarcity, and disaster risk management, the world needs a stronger and more effective FAO more than ever. We look forward to working closely together with FAO and its members. We must do more to build resilience. We must do better on anticipatory and preventative action. The livelihoods and lives of billions of people depend on this. Never has it been more imperative for us to work together - in partnership, with FAO, at country level, across the international system, with all stakeholders. The UK is committed to this.

Thank you.