

Extraordinary CFS Bureau and Advisory Group Meeting
Discussion with the Special Envoy for the 2021 Food Systems Summit

Remarks as prepared by Agnes Kalibata, UN Secretary General's Special Envoy

Introductory Remarks

Thank you Chair, and thanks to all of you in the CFS Bureau, Advisory Group, and Secretariat for the opportunity to speak with you today as we continue planning for the 2021 Food Systems Summit.

As we discussed on the call last week on the impacts of COVID-19 on food systems, a lot has changed since my visit in Rome with the CFS Chair, HLPE Chair, and Secretariat on February 10th.

Already we are seeing the pressure COVID is having on value chains, even in sophisticated systems. Fresh fruit and vegetables are being left to rot in Spain, Italy, and southern France. The labor situation along the entire food supply chain is under immense strain.

The labor problems have some worried that urban shoppers could face produce shortages. The concern is that even crops that get picked won't reach consumers because outdoor markets are closed and transport links are uncertain.

More urgently, we are seeing in India – the largest lockdown of 1.3 billion people – that millions of vulnerable people are on the sharp edge of hunger.

Overall, this pandemic has only reinforced the critical importance of the Food Systems Summit. It has shown many of our challenges and the fragility of our systems, particularly for the most marginalized populations in all of our countries around the world.

At the start of the Decade of Action, this Summit will be an opportunity to change the trajectory of our progress towards achieving the SDGs through the transformation of food systems all over the world.

This Summit preparatory process is just getting underway. Due to the pandemic and some systemic delays, it was just last week that we were able to start bringing together a small, independent Summit Secretariat that can work on this Summit with the global community. We are still forming our support structures, and hope to have them put in place during the course of April. These will be multi-stakeholder and pulling on expertise and perspectives of constituencies from all around the world.

As the preparatory now gets underway, we're looking to hear what's important to everyone to shape our vision and action tracks. We want to hear what's important to you. Already we've heard from people in a few key areas that we need to look at systemically and holistically:

1. Food for all / Ag Transformation for Zero Hunger
2. Reducing Food Loss and Food Waste
3. Nature Positive Production
4. Increase healthy and sustainable food
5. Advance equitable and resilient livelihoods

There's a lot out there already in terms of evidence, knowledge, ideas, innovations, and actions. We want to hear what you think we should be building on, such as the work of the CFS and its HLPE reports.

What we need to do is build on these and drive the transformation of food systems at the scale and speed required.

There are also many events we must build on, even if these are evolving quickly in the face of the global pandemic. We want to leverage other events and what multi-stakeholder groups are advancing, such as the upcoming CFS meetings in October and its emerging agreement on the Voluntary Guidelines for Food Systems & Nutrition.

This is an agenda that must be owned by everyone, and so we are looking to get all ideas on the table and to ensure action is owned and driven by different actors. We are designing a transparent and inclusive process through which we can engage holistically in all countries and regions of the world. We want to develop mechanisms for an open global dialogue, engagements in all countries, and self-mobilization by various constituencies. We look forward to your views on what is essential in this design.

I also want to underscore that this will ultimately be a Summit about action. We want to change the narrative and elevate understanding around our food systems, but we will also want commitments to change and to hold ourselves accountable to those commitments long after the Summit has passed.

The Secretary General has called for this Summit to support a Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs and so this Summit is an opportunity to leverage more ambition from some of the usual suspects and to draw in unusual suspects into our common agenda.

Closing Remarks

Thank you again for your time and all of these ideas and questions.

It is very helpful to have a better sense of the diversity of this CFS mechanism, as well as the interrelatedness of these ideas in how we can drive forward transformation in our food systems.

This is just the start of our ongoing work together. I look forward to hearing more from you as we continue, and I commit to you that the Summit Secretariat and myself will continue to engage deeply with the CFS to ensure we best advance a shared agenda.

While we are still finalizing the summit support structures and processes, we can be clear that we expect the CFS and its mechanisms will be deeply involved on several levels:

- participation in the formal support structures that we expect to be finalized in April;
- engagement of the HLPE and secretariat in the evidence and policy workstream;
- ongoing updates and dialogues on at least a quarterly basis as desired in Rome (similar commitment that the Summit Secretariat is making to all permanent representatives);
- engagement in action tracks as they are formed; and,
- engagement in multistakeholder dialogues and consultations at multiple levels going forward (virtual calls, national dialogues, regional dialogues, etc...) to move towards priorities and actions

Thank you, and stay safe and healthy.