

**Statement delivered by**  
**His Excellency Tom J. Vilsack**  
**Secretary of Agriculture of the United States of America**  
**on the occasion of the**  
**42nd Session of the FAO Conference (14-18 June 2021)**  
**14 June 2021**

*Honorable Chair Kurtyka,*  
*Director-General Qu,*  
*Distinguished Delegates,*  
*Excellencies, and Guests,*

It is an honour to join colleagues from all over the world in this first-ever virtual meeting of the FAO Conference.

These are extraordinary times. As some countries appear to be emerging from the worst of the pandemic with cautious optimism, while others are in the throes of catastrophic circumstances. It's clear that our work to help the world overcome and recover from the grave impact of this pandemic is far from over. We face unprecedented challenges, from extreme weather and climate shifts to ongoing conflicts and rising food insecurity, that have only been exacerbated by the fallout from COVID-19. The most obvious and tragic example is the situation in Tigray, where the United States fears famine is already occurring, threatening the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. That is why on June 8 the United States announced that we are contributing an additional USD 181 million in assistance as we engage with our partners to seek a durable political solution to this crisis. However, many more may be in famine conditions by September. A second failed harvesting season, which will very likely happen, would kill countless people. This avoidable humanitarian nightmare illustrates the need for our redoubled effort.

But with every great challenge comes opportunity. The road to recovery offers us a chance to build forward better, deepening resilience to future shocks and promoting sustainable livelihoods that leave no one behind and that protect our planet. The possibility of making real and lasting change to our agriculture and food systems gives me great hope for the future.

And so, our FAO Conference agenda is both urgent and critical as we map out FAO's next ten-year strategy through the Strategic Framework and the Program of Work and Budget. The work ahead includes:

- Elevating the importance of climate change and how FAO can address it within its mandate;
- Reaffirming FAO's mandate to support international standard setting and safety;
- Strengthening FAO's preparation and response to food and agricultural threats and emergencies;
- Embracing a more agile approach to innovation, through cutting edge technologies, science-based applications for farmers, creative partnerships, and even the organization's business model;
- Building a way forward to improve animal health and prevent zoonotic spillover; and
- Allocating the appropriate resources to achieving our results.

This is a bold agenda that calls for coordinated effort and our collective and renewed commitment to multilateralism, anchored in the core values and principles of the United Nations and international rules-based order.

I urge all of us to ground our work this week in the wider context of our shared goals: ending hunger and improving food security. Just after this conference, we look forward to the G-20 Summit convened by our Italian hosts, as well as the Food Systems Summit and pre-Summit, COP 26, and the Nutrition for Growth Summit. The United States will show leadership at each of these events through concrete commitments in partnership with other stakeholders. We will use our commitments to address the global hunger crisis and advance social, economic, and environmental sustainability throughout the world.

But to make true progress, it is imperative that we use this strategy-building session to reaffirm support for science-based and data-driven decision-making and promoting innovations of every type -- including new scientific methods, cutting-edge technologies, ecological and biosecurity management approaches.

The innovative approaches we champion must be as dynamic as the shifting challenges that our farmers, ranchers, foresters, fishers, and others face. We must optimize farmer-led solutions and be open to the next big idea, as well as continue to invest in the agility and resilience of agriculture, rural communities, and supply chains around the globe. And we must continue to promote markets and trade, as well as the pivotal role FAO plays in setting standards for international trade, food safety, and plant health protection. Because if we don't improve life and economic viability for farmers, the future of food security will only be more unpredictable and more unstable.

We all recognize that global food insecurity was at unacceptable levels even before the COVID-19 pandemic - driven by entrenched conflicts, natural disasters, climate change, and economic shocks. The Biden Administration, alongside many others in the global community, has worked to expand and adapt our food security programs and improve COVID-19 response and recovery efforts to meet the needs of roughly 155 million food insecure people around the world. Concerted efforts to work with both development and humanitarian actors to meet urgent needs while also addressing the underlying drivers that make people vulnerable to food insecurity is paramount. FAO's leadership - both through the upcoming Food Systems Summit and through its leadership in the Global Network Against Food Crises - present critical opportunities to further these goals.

The climate crisis is an urgent threat disrupting the lives of many, but I believe the agriculture sector can - and it must -- lead on climate action and solutions. In April, President Biden convened a Leaders Summit on Climate to rally the world in tackling the climate crisis. The United States announced a target of 50-52 percent REDUCTION from 2005 levels in economy-wide greenhouse gas pollution by 2030. And we intend to double, by 2024, our annual public climate financing to developing countries as well as to mobilize private capital to follow suit. My Department plans to invest more than USD 1 billion in conservation, science and research, and rural development.

We congratulate FAO for integrating sustainability and climate change into every facet of programming and for committing to revise its climate strategy while staying focused on its core mandate. We look forward to seeing how far we can advance those endeavors in this new Strategic Framework.

The FAO Strategic Framework is a strong vision for a better world. We appreciate FAO's aim to contribute to the Agenda 2030 and for sharing greater knowledge on challenges, threats, trade-offs, and transformational opportunities.

We welcome FAO Member States' commitment to ensuring this agency joins others in embracing and deepening the implementation of best practices and principles of good governance, including secure elections that ensure the inclusivity and the integrity of the vote, a code of conduct that sets out robust

principles for our exercise of the most fundamental of our membership rights, and in accountability, an area in which FAO has made significant recent progress.

FAO was created to solve big, complex problems, where the fates of people around the world are tied together and where no single country alone can address the enormity of global challenges. So, let's remember that as we move forward -- we are stronger together, and together we can shape the future of food and agriculture for the better.

Thank you very much.