



## OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR THE UNITED NATIONS FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

### Remarks by the Special Envoy to the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN Environment

- Thank you Mr. Chairman and Your Excellency, Ambassador of Brazil, as well as Executive Director Andersen. I am honored to join you today. While we face a sobering reality in our world today, I am encouraged that we are not only making progress in the fight against the health crisis, but we are also staying focused as a community on a how to make larger improvements in our world.
- Upon taking up this role, I had hoped to be with you in person by now. Nairobi has been my own home for the past nearly 6 years, and I'm about to take up an office in UNON alongside UNEP. So, I am especially grateful for the opportunity to speak with you now.
- To start, I must underscore the present reality and priority threat facing the world: **We must focus on beating this pandemic, but we must also act now to ensure this health crisis does not become a food crisis**, with even greater deaths and devastating consequences for nutrition and sustainable development.
- **From where I sit, here in Nairobi, this is already emerging as an existential threat, even just 3 months into the pandemic.** Food systems are being challenged, and all governments and companies are looking at what to do. While developed countries might have less than 5% of their population working in agriculture, African countries still have 60-70% of their populations working in agriculture, and many other people in cities living hand to mouth who can't isolate and stay alive.
- **While we do not have a vaccine for this novel virus, we do have the tools and means to prevent a food crisis if we focus our collective attention and act swiftly.** We must enable production in countries where the season is starting – keeping small shops open and protecting extension agents as they work with farmers to plant. We must enable harvest and access to markets where the season is ending – allowing transport of food and the management of strategic food reserves. It is great to see the UN system leading the way.
- Viewed through a global lens, **the COVID-19 pandemic is already further exposing inherent challenges in our food systems and is actively threatening the lives and livelihoods of people around the world, particularly the most vulnerable.** The current stress on our food systems underscores the fragility of these systems and the interconnectedness of global challenges and their impacts on people, planet, and prosperity.
- **The question that we face as a global community is not whether we will get through this. We will. The question is what kind of world we want to live in on the other side of this crisis.**
- As we work to overcome the crisis of today, we must therefore not allow this crisis to rollback hard won gains on the 2030 Agenda or turn our attention away from our collective drive to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources.

- These are the conditions that will allow us to be more prepared and more resilient to future shocks and crises. **This is the world we want and that we need.**
- **Which brings me to my role as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Food Systems Summit.** The current crisis has forced a recalibration of our preliminary thinking, but it has also reinforced the importance of this work on the road to the Summit in 2021.
- This Summit is evolving into a critical opportunity to support the Secretary-General's call that the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis must lead to a different economy and to societies that are more equal, inclusive and sustainable.
- **Improving our food systems are a critical part of addressing immediate social and economic responses to the pandemic, but they are also an area where we can "build back better".** This will demand that we more rapidly move in solidarity with one another in support of transformative actions and food systems approaches that work for all people and the environment.
- Indeed, **the current crisis doesn't change the other global challenges that were already before us:** Despite living in an age of unprecedented wealth and progress, where we produce more than enough food for everyone, poverty and hunger remain entrenched. Food systems contribute up to 29% of all greenhouse gas emissions, including 44% of methane. In terms of biodiversity, one million species are now threatened with extinction, posing serious threats for human beings.
- **As I've discussed with Dr. Andersen, the very source of this pandemic stems from our failing food systems.** The WHO estimates that as much as 75% of the new infectious diseases we face today, such as COVID-19, SARS, and bird flu, originate in wildlife as a result of poor food safety and human activity linked to encroachment on the environment.
- **But in our food systems lies opportunity.** There is consensus that transforming food systems also offers one of the single strongest opportunities we have for food security and nutrition, for human health, for climate, and for the environment. It is one of the strongest opportunities to change course and realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda for people, planet, and prosperity.
- To make this happen, the Summit will mobilize innovative ideas, partnerships, and multi-stakeholder dialogues to understand and work through the inevitable trade-offs that we will face. It will include a particular focus on those living day to day at every step of the food system. But it will also remind us that everyone is part of the food system and must join in creating the change we need. **The Summit will therefore mobilize action from all actors - countries, cities, communities, companies, civil society, consumers, and food producers.**
- **We the Secretary-General is putting in place a number of multi-stakeholder support structures to achieve this aim.** There will be an announcement shortly about the Advisory Committee, Scientific Group and an expansive Champions Network which will continue to be co-created throughout the duration of the summit and beyond. There will also be a UN Taskforce to bring in the best of the whole UN system around this holistic issue of food systems to achieve the SDGs.
- **As we continue to develop thinking on the action-tracks for the Summit, we would also welcome your thoughts on where we should focus.** There is already a lot of scientific evidence to points us in particular direction: food and agricultural transformation to deliver zero hunger and malnutrition; increasing the amount and accessibility of healthy and sustainable food; reducing

food loss and food waste; nature positive production to address the environmental challenges we face; and, advancing equitable and resilient livelihoods.

- **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 want to develop mechanisms for an open global dialogue, engagements in all countries, and self-mobilization by various constituencies which **will also build on existing networks and dialogue processes like UNEA, where we are excited to partner with you into next year.**
- **We see this as the start of our ongoing work together. The Summit Secretariat is just beginning to come online.** Obviously, it is virtual for now; but, eventually it will primarily be located with a small headquarters here in Nairobi, a satellite office in New York, and another satellite office also in Rome alongside the Rome-Based Agencies.
- **As we continue to adapt in light of the crisis and as our plans further coalesce over the coming months, we will continue to engage you and update you on progress.** I would also welcome future opportunities to speak with you again like this and benefit from your feedback as we embark on this journey together to ensure we best advance a shared agenda.
- Thank you.