

**Coalition Call with Ambassador Erica Barks-Ruggles**  
**Senior Bureau Official with the Bureau of International Organization Affairs**  
**State Department**

Friday, June 11, 2021

Notes

On Friday, June 11 Coalition representatives from 18 organizations met with State Department office of International Organization Affairs (IO). The goal of the call was to push for greater transparency into State's actions on the UN Food Systems Summit (FSS) and highlight the importance of their leadership in pushing for USG positioning, coordinating interagency efforts, and driving support of other allied countries. There was a large staff in attendance from State IO, Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs (EB) and USUN Rome including: Monique Nowicki, Rose Marks, Nerissa Cook, Tom Duffy, Jennifer Harhigh, and Alison Storsve.

After the Ambassador opened the call, Constance Cullman from AFIA provided an overview of the Coalition and key asks of State. This was followed by remarks from Coalition members (ASTA, NAMI). Coalition members highlighted that the timeline, which includes the ministerial, which is now a little more than a month away, and then action shifting to New York, in advance of the Summit and the UN General Assembly, the United States should accelerate and amplify its efforts to:

- Drive and elevate FSS outcomes and positive solutions that align with U.S. objectives for ag innovation, climate, development, and food security and – just as importantly;
- Clearly identify and **push back** on proposals that do not align with U.S. positions and priorities; and
- Actively collaborate and coordinate with likeminded countries, many of whom have raised serious substantive and process concerns in both Rome and New York.

Ambassador Erica Barks-Ruggles remarks overview included:

- The need for governments to work together with industry, and farmers to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and make progress
- State is trying to advocate for the largest set of tools for food and ag as outcomes from the Summit (not one size fits all)
- Outcomes from the FSS should be voluntary
- Specifically, State is working to ensure that innovation, and diet diversity (cultural diets) are captured
- State is also sensitive to noting that the process does not leave behind or overshadow developing nations and that there is a need to focus on nutrition and food security
- She welcomed any papers, data, or examples of solutions that have or have not worked well from the Coalition

Highlights of remarks included:

- State is highly engaged in the process with 17 agencies involved on the interagency working group. They are providing feedback to papers and Action tracks in the FSS
- **State will be hosting a public listening session AFTER the July pre-summit ministerial meeting to hear how things are progressing in the public's eyes**

*Positions/USG Engagement*

- State noted that they are pushing back on problem areas such as a lack of transparency, or restrictive/non-science based positions.
- State is asking FSS to focus on internationally agreed upon language, making sure that the right experts in the space, and noting that FSS should not replace other avenues (like Codex)

- State is utilizing the USG positions, a 17 page document that has watchouts and positive messages. They have aligned messaging across agencies.
- State has highlighted the themes of inclusions, productivity, food safety, partnership with the private sector.
- Science-based positions are a long standing US policy and things like Farm to Form (more political than scientific).
- State noted that while messages have gone out to FAS posts on FSS, a formal Demarche cable has not yet been sent.
- Tom Duffy, State EB (head of Ag policy), noted that a focus on Member State's role is right and they must continue to push back on problematic approaches like Farm to Fork.

#### *FSS Progress*

Jennifer Harhigh, gave an overview of how things are going on the ground in Rome:

- State is trying to maintain a positive framing and focus on producing more to feed more people (HUNGER).
- State is seeing positive progress when it comes to science and innovation. For example, FAO is now openly talking about biotechnology in documents. This is major progress.
- Member States are engaging through the Advisory Committee, which has taken a larger role over the past months.

#### *Pre-Summit (July 26-28)*

- The Pre-Summit is a hybrid event with many questions remaining, including who will be in attendance and the format/agenda. There will be 5 heads of State (one from each Region) and ministers from countries in attendance with a total of 300 people in person.
- State is working to keep tabs on side events and is asking Secretariat to focus on those with more consensus (school feeding vs. agroecology).
- There are complaints about the lack of inclusivity in the pre-summit event as several Member States can't send delegates to Rome.

#### *Coalition Remarks Overview/Main Points*

*These were the main points expressed during the call*

- Coalition's goal is working with USG to provide information about the ag and food supply chains contributions and commitments and to support positive outcomes that align with Administration's goals on ag, innovation, climate, and food security while working to guard against proposals that do not advance U.S. goals.
- We see a key role and urgent need for USG leadership (USDA/State/USAID) to navigate the UN process in the lead up to NY Summit, advance U.S. positions, and build coalitions with likeminded member states.
- We understand the administration has significantly advanced the interagency process of setting positions, and we are strongly supportive of U.S. positions supporting:
  - Promotion of agricultural productivity and growth through innovation;
  - A no one-size fits all approach (no good foods or bad foods); and
  - Promotion of risk-based international standards.
- It's critical that the entire interagency and stakeholders like those in the coalition work together and with likeminded countries to advance positive priorities and hold the line on FSS outcomes that could jeopardize real solutions. In particular, we are very concerned to see how the UN has limited Member States' role and oversight thus far.
- It's very clear from the first two waves of game changers, the draft outline for the Secretary General's remarks, and even the just-released "true cost of food" paper that there are significant areas of concern where the FSS outcomes may not align with U.S.

objectives unless there is significant activation at the most senior political levels to correct course.

- We need State's support in ensuring these issues are addressed and that any FSS outcomes, including recommendations issued by the UN Director General or Summit leadership, are consistent with U.S. priorities.
- We need State's help and need your leadership and coordination with the US/UN Team in NY and the UN Ambassador.