

**Remarks by Ambassador Elizabeth Cousens, U.S.
Representative to ECOSOC, for the US/Canada/Israel Team,
3rd Session of the SDG Open Working Group, on Food
Security and Nutrition, Sustainable Agriculture,
Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought**

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Thank you very much. I'll just make a few points taking the opportunity to comment on issues raised by colleagues and panelists. For the sake of time, I'll just address a few issues but note that we heard many interesting ideas to which we may want to return in the course of our deliberations. Let me also thank the UN Task Team for their excellent work on the background papers, which were extremely helpful syntheses of the issues. We have five points on substance and two on process points.

First, we have heard broad agreement that ending hunger and food insecurity is urgent, central to our agenda, and that we have the knowledge and capacity to address these issues decisively and irreversibly. This is good news.

With hunger, this means going beyond the MDG measure of simple caloric intake to addressing broader nutritional issues and impacts that drive health outcomes. With food insecurity, this means addressing integrated solutions across the whole value chain, including addressing chronic distribution issues; better resource and ecosystems management, particularly in drylands where so much small-scale agricultural production takes place; measures to reduce the 30 percent of food waste in the supply chain; and innovative measures to manage risk and increase resilience to shocks and chronic stresses. We have also heard virtually everyone call for central attention to gender and we've heard numerous interventions speak to the importance of secure land tenure – a complex issue and one that we agree needs to be tackled seriously. We are also very glad that several colleagues have reminded us that these issues are also about sustainable fisheries and oceans ecosystems.

As I mentioned yesterday, we also agree about the importance of addressing desertification and land degradation in drylands and further believe there are important lessons we all can learn from communities in existing drylands as other parts of the world face transitions to

dryer conditions.

Second, we agree with the emphasis many colleagues have placed on the role of knowledge, information, and technology. We see tremendous potential to take advantage of new information and communication technologies and new platforms for cooperation to share ideas, diffuse knowledge, and spur innovation in agricultural practices and land and water use. We appreciate the emphasis of yesterday's panelists and many colleagues on knowledge-sharing as well as the potential of traditional practices and technologies, often readily available at low cost, to promote sustainable intensification of agriculture.

Third, we appreciate the emphasis that many have put on investment and welcome recent reversal in trends in agricultural investment and note that it will be essential to consider the full spectrum of financial flows that can be captured – public, private, remittances, bundling of micro-investment, etcetera. We would also emphasize the need to look at agricultural investment in the context of broader strategies for rural development.

Fourth, our team has been struck throughout this discussion by many examples showing the extraordinary range of multilateral mechanisms and more informal platforms that have developed in recent years to address these issues. As we go forward in this group, we will need to all think very clearly about how SDGs can be best formulated in a way that spurs action in those other venues and platforms and does not duplicate or confuse good work already being done.

Fifth, this basket of issues powerfully demonstrates the interlinkage of issues and need for holistic strategies, many colleagues have commented on this. I would just note that we appreciated the UAE's initiative last week with the PGA to host a dialogue on the water-energy nexus, and we hope all members were able to participate. We are also attracted to Germany's suggestion to think about issue "clusters" which may help us reflect linkages in the goals and targets we propose. We would also emphasize that interlinkage does not mean every goal has to be about everything. Rather our goals need to be well-informed by understanding the causal relationships between issues, interaction effects and positive and negative impacts, and they need to be designed to catalyze specific actions that will exert the greatest positive, mutually reinforcing impacts.

Last, two process points. I want to pick up first on your call to propose goals and targets. We certainly welcome all ideas but we also want to be clear that from our perspective, this is an early stage of the process where it would be premature to start as a group to formulate goals or targets. For example, there are issues central to food security and sustainable land and water use that we will not be discussing for months (e.g., jobs, infrastructure, gender, oceans). For our part, our team members have also deliberately

refrained from final positions on what should be goals or targets in order to learn, listen to others, and only as our discussions mature get to that level of specificity.

We finally want to say a word about the summaries from our meetings. As colleagues know, we've encouraged the co-chairs and secretariat to keep running notes, in particular, of specific ideas and examples that people raise. This can be very helpful when later in the process we need to return to them. However, we have one suggestion and offer one cautionary point. Our suggestion is to keep a running list of goals, targets and indicators proposed. Clustering them would be useful; you may not even need to source them.

The cautionary is this. Right now, we need to focus on substance. We do not need to be spending our time debating the content of summaries. The purpose of this stage of our discussion is to speak freely, to float ideas, to see what sticks, and do so without worrying about eventual negotiating positions. Your summaries should not have to bear the burden of comprehensively reflecting the views in the room. In the interest of dialogue, many of us are also refraining from speaking on every potential aspect of a given issue or of raising points of disagreement. So I just want to be clear that we welcome summaries – they can be very helpful to our work – but we view them as working documents of the co-chairs and should not be understood as having to be endorsed or approved by the group. So we encourage you in that regard.

Thank you.

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