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Chapeau: Taking a human-rights- and rule-of-law-based approach to achieving the SDGs

United Nations [Our Common Agenda](#) in aid of the mid-term review and achievement of the 2030 sustainable Development Goals at the Summit of the Future in Sept 2024.

Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development

A. Law reform offers more cost-effective promise than meagre additional funding to achieve SDGs.

While billions more dollars may be forthcoming, the amount per citizen in Low-Income Countries pales by comparison—by several orders of magnitude—to the amounts spent by High-Income Countries on COVID-19 mitigation measures within their own borders and, of course, all other social safety net supports. One cannot expect meagre investment to have transformational impacts as if by magic. For instance, annual official development assistance by OECD countries increased from \$156 billion per year to \$169 billion from 2019 to 2021 when the ravages of COVID-19 became most worrisome. (See: <https://data.oecd.org/oda/net-oda.htm>) As His Excellency *Munir Akram*, former President of the Economic and Social Council, explained¹ developing economies have had access to \$100 billion in COVID-19 mitigation funds (including loans), but High-Income Countries injected US\$17 trillion dollars into their own economies to recover from COVID-19, 170-fold more. The contrast between meagre official development assistance to mitigate COVID-19 harm in Low- and Middle-Income Countries to Canadian federal government’s compassionate, generous internal financial supports for Canadians reveals a thousand-fold difference in protective spending per capita compared to OECD donor assistance in LMICs, expressed as receipts per capita.² Considering that LMIC countries exceed the total population of high-income countries by approximately six-fold, the per capita disparity in government support to populations is approximately 1,000-fold and loans and grants combined constitute less than \$10 per capita per year. ECOSOC President Akram called for “out-of-box thinking” to end world hunger and malnutrition in all its forms and FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu, PhD urged that, when money is scarce, you need more wisdom.³

Smart regulations can expedite the proliferation and implementation of wise ideas.

National governments have plenary and ample authority to change their own laws. They may lack relatively inexpensive technical support for legal drafting and assurances of litigation support if those laws are challenged by companies or exporting countries in national courts or international trade dispute resolution tribunals. United Nations institutions are generally reluctant to take sides in litigation between member states and in domestic courts except, for example, in supporting general improvements to general litigation and prosecution policy, for example, rights of children in criminal, adoption, and child protection proceedings.

B. Recognize and address the contribution of food from ruminant animals to greenhouse gas emissions.

The threat to the right to a healthy environment posed by greenhouse gas emissions from ruminant animals is real and substantial. Globally, widespread poverty is the main impediment to ruminants rivalling the harm fossil fuels contribute to an over-heating planet. Generally, as incomes rise, so does consumption of meat, including beef, goat, and lamb meat. Some of the evidence of this harm comes from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the UN Secretary General's Independent Group of Scientists, a Lancet Commission, a group of experts at Oxford University, and a report published in the prestigious journal *Nature Food*.

By many accounts outside of FAO, the vast majority of GHG emissions from food systems come from ruminant animals (especially cattle) which collectively contribute approx. 1/5th of total GHG with feed changes, etc. leading to only small reductions. Because methane reductions can lead to faster reductions in temperature, reducing the production and consumption of these animals seems to be a terribly under-utilized means of cooling the planet. In particular:

- The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change indicated that the vast majority of food-related contributions to harmful greenhouse gas emissions emanate from cattle and that food systems contribute 21–37% of total global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.⁴
- The United Nations Secretary General's Independent Group of Scientists recommended, in part, the following to achieve the SDGs: "global reduction in meat consumption of around 40–50 per cent..."⁵
- The recent Lancet Commission report repeated observations that 30% of GHG emissions comes from food systems, of which 57% comes from the production of red meat and milk (mostly from ruminants).⁶
- An Oxford University team found that GHG emissions from meat and other animal-origin foods are vastly higher than plant-based food.⁷
- A study published in *Nature Food* and posted on the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) website: estimated that 57% of GHG emissions from the food system comes from livestock.⁸

Consumers and ranchers be made aware of this so they can make future purchases and animal husbandry decisions in an informed, sustainable way. FAO must encourage its subsidiary organization, the Codex Alimentarius Commission's new guidance to encourage national

governments to make sustainability labelling rules mandatory, regardless of whether companies make green claims. (See: <http://healthscienceandlaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CHSL-BillJeffery.FoodLaw.EcoLabels.pdf>)

Chapter II. International peace and security

National government must launch national consultations to fully implement the rights to food, water, health, and a healthy environment and the building block laws and policies to realize those rights—such as nutrition-sensitive agriculture and the fulfilling the right to know about product risks and benefits—the abuse and violations of which severely impair health, productivity and the despair of populations that fuels poverty and conflict. See, especially [Articles 11 \(right to food\), and Article 12 \(right to health\) of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*](#).

The object of “progressive realization” has come to mean “weak realization” and “never full realization.”

A rights-based approach means ensuring the duty-bearers, within national borders or abroad respect the rights of natural citizens to health and nutrition. Countries rich and poor, North and South should support the efforts of the United Nations Human Rights Council’s [Open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights](#) and support the efforts of the United Nations Human Rights Council’s [Working Group on the Right to Development](#) efforts to negotiate encourage their efforts to negotiate a [Convention on the Right to Development and both recognize and stress the importance of nutrition, food security and disease prevention in the elaboration of legally binding instrument](#).

Consumer rights are, by definition, human rights in relation to business entities as illustrated by the UN Human Rights Council Committee on the Rights of the Child [General Comment No. 16 \(esp. section VI.A.2\)](#) and in relation to its [Concluding Observations on Canada in June 2022 \(esp. para 16\)](#).

Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

See the recommendations for changes to global governance, especially safeguards to declare and curb the undue influence of experts with financial conflicts of interest.

Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

Urge national governments to develop and mandate Child Rights Impact Assessments and launch national consultations to make time-delimited plans to fully implement in domestic law, policy, and government budgeting the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.

Chapter V. Transforming global governance

Please consider the consultation and negotiation of a United Nations Code of Conduct for engaging with civil society and experts to make United Nations standard-setting and guidance more accountable and robust.

To date the call for the Code of Conduct has been endorsed by 421 CSOs and experts. There is a great deal of encouraging rhetoric about the importance of civil society participation in UN deliberations, but a patchwork of practices across UN institutions, many of which severely impede or impair the participation of CSOs. The call for a Code of Conduct urges 19 features, including:

- 1) establish a **right to participate remotely** with only reasonable constraints on communications (in-person-only meetings supplemented only by UN WebTV are common),
- 2) ensure adequate **advance notice** of meetings,
- 3) **exempt ECOSOC- or otherwise UN-accredits delegates from national visa impediments** (especially by the United States and Switzerland, and Italy),
- 4) ensure dependable access to **financial support for travel and participation** of low-resource civil society organization, especially from remote and low-resource location and especially in consideration of the sizable financial benefits to New York, Geneva, and other UN hubs to host UN deliberations,
- 5) establish meaningful **protections against intimidation and reprisals** for participation,
- 6) establish a UN **lobbyist registry**,
- 7) establish a formal right and mechanism to **access-to-information**,
- 8) make **in-camera meetings—from which CSOs and the media are excluded--the rare exception** not the norm,
- 9) automatically and promptly **publish online government and CSO written representations**,
- 10) put an **end to arbitrary and politically motivated accreditation delays, amounting to vetoes of the ECOSOC accreditation** of non-governmental organizations by minority and single-members of the UN Economic and Social Council,
- 11) **ensure that civil society input is made before (not after) decisions** are made by government delegates, and
- 12) establish **conflict of interest safeguards**.

The joint statement is available at: <https://tinyurl.com/Proposal-for-UN-CodeOfConduct>

ENDNOTES

¹ Launch event of *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022* July 6, 2022, New York. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/5880/icode/> At time: 1:34.

² Foreign aid rose to an all-time high when the world faced a widely acknowledged common foe: COVID-19. Official Development Assistance rose closer than ever to the pre-pandemic decades-long, widely ignored call by the [World Bank and United Nations](#) that countries contribute 0.7% of GDP. However, the uptick in funding for Low- and Middle-Income-Countries from High-Income-Countries paled in comparison to the dramatic rise in government assistance from governments of High-Income-Countries to their own residents within their own borders—despite the

widely acknowledge rhetoric of solidarity—outstripping foreign COVID-specific aid, in some cases by approximately 1,000-fold (\$10,000 per citizen in Canada (at p. 4 of the Nov 2020 Economic Statement) compared to the sum mustered for all foreign aid for from all countries of approximately \$6 billion to support 6.5 billion residents in Low- and Middle Income Countries.

³ Launch event of *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022* July 6, 2022, New York. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/5880/icode/>

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). *Special Report on Climate Change and Land, CH05, Food Security. Executive Summary*. 2019. Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/src/cl/chapter/chapter5/>

⁵ Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General (2023). *Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Times of Crisis, Times of Change: Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development*. United Nations, New York. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/gedr/gedr2023>

⁶ Romanello M, Napoli CD, et al. The 2023 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: the imperative for a health-centred response in a world facing irreversible harms. *The Lancet*. 2023 Nov 13:S0140-6736(23)01859-7. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(23)01859-7. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 37977174. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)01859-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)01859-7/fulltext)

⁷ Clark M, Springmann M, Rayner M, Scarborough P, Hill J, Tilman D, Macdiarmid JI, Fanzo J, Bandy L, Harrington RA. Estimating the environmental impacts of 57,000 food products. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. 2022 Aug 16;119(33):e2120584119. Bill Jeffery. Conference Notes. “The contribution of Ruminant Animal Meat to Greenhouse Gas Emissions and a Warming Planet.” 7th Biennial Championing Public Health Nutrition. Centre for Health Science and Law. June 8, 2023. Available at: <http://healthscienceandlaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CHSL-BillJeffery.FoodLaw.EcoLabels.pdf>

⁸ Xu, X., Sharma, P., Shu, S. et al. Global greenhouse gas emissions from animal-based foods are twice those of plant-based foods. *Nature Food* 2, 724–732 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00358-x> Available at: <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7033en/cb7033en.pdf>