

Testimony of Ambassador Kip Tom
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Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Multilateral Development,
Multilateral Institutions, and International Economic, Energy, and Environmental Policy

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Chairman Young, Ranking Member Merkley, and all Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear here today.

The U.S. Mission to the United Nations Agencies in Rome represents the United States' interests to the three UN principal organizations dedicated to food and agriculture, as well as three international organizations handling the rule of law, harmonization of commercial law, and cultural heritage preservation. As a successful seventh-generation family farmer, I came into this job knowing what it takes to grow agriculture, create jobs, and empower youth. I also came into this position appreciating the strong leadership of this Committee and the United States on global food security. After more than six months in Rome, I am pleased to report to you on the central leadership role that the United States takes at the United Nations, as we advance our nation's interests.

First, the World Food Programme (or WFP) is in good hands under the leadership of Executive Director David Beasley, the former Governor of South Carolina. The scale of humanitarian need and forced displacement around the world is unprecedented, and WFP provided food, cash-based transfers, and commodity vouchers to over 86 million people in 2018. The United States remains a leader in generosity and assistance, as we are likely to donate nearly 3 billion U.S. dollars through WFP this year. With a staggering 821 million people globally who are undernourished, WFP demonstrates the value of the international community coming together, under strong U.S. leadership, to deliver critical life-saving support to so many of the world's most vulnerable. Our continued leadership is saving lives and furthering the interests of our country every day.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (or FAO) is equally critical to American interests, given its role in Codex Alimentarius and setting the food safety standards that give the

framework for American farmers to be the leading exporters of agricultural products globally. FAO must also provide the tools and policy support for agricultural practitioners and rural communities to transform in response to modern challenges. These tools should include biotechnology and other innovations so farmers can make informed choices. If FAO works the way it should, by enhancing people's livelihoods and economic potential in all communities, we can advance key American objectives, including by addressing some of the root causes of conflict and economic migration. Simply put, if we don't get FAO right, we simply cannot put enough money into WFP to meet future challenges.

However, there are challenges at FAO. Like other UN agencies, FAO needs to address issues such as opaque hiring practices, waste and overlap, and concerns about misconduct. FAO, like all UN agencies, has undertaken specific commitments to fight potential sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers operating under its auspices. FAO is under new leadership, with former Chinese Vice Minister of Agriculture Dr. Qu Dongyu taking office in August of this year. As Dr. Qu himself has said, we can and must hold FAO's leadership to account in ensuring that FAO is an organization that meets the interests of all member states and directly addresses the significant challenges facing rural communities today.

Dr. Qu has promised to improve FAO's models by giving farmers expanded access to all the tools and knowledge to help them feed themselves. He also recognizes that the world is changing and his team needs to increase partnership with the private sector to ensure agriculture and rural communities are economically sustainable. We will hold both FAO and Dr. Qu to these promises.

With this leadership change, the strong U.S. voice at FAO is more critical than ever. We provide more than \$100 million in assessed contributions annually--and a similar amount in voluntary funds--to support critical work such as addressing animal and plant health globally, and responding to agricultural crises. But we are also working to ensure that FAO is held accountable and is transparent in decision-making and crafting the programs that impact the global community.

My team works daily to ensure American citizens are equitably represented amongst FAO employees, including at the senior level. Our scientists and agriculture experts, for

instance, are top-notch. We need the critical thinking skills and evidence-based decision-making they bring to the table for discussions about agriculture policies and tools. We also seek to ensure a fair playing field for American agricultural interests through negotiations and policies on agriculture and standards.

The United States demonstrates similar leadership at the other international agencies in Rome. For example, as the president of the Standing Committee of the International Development Law Organization, we just led a process to select a strong new Director General to lead this critical organization in addressing rule of law challenges globally. This week, our negotiators are concluding a protocol to facilitate financing for the sale of mining, agriculture, and construction equipment to developing countries. We work with institutions like the International Fund for Agriculture Development to ensure low-cost loans or grants for growing new small businesses in rural areas, thereby generating jobs.

Today, I am proud to uphold the work we do in Rome as a clear example demonstrating the United States remains a central leader at the United Nations and in the multilateral sphere. We need to maintain and increase our presence to further American interests globally. As a business leader, I have always believed that there is nothing more important to a leader's success than the ability to unify those with different backgrounds and interests behind a common purpose. We see this daily at the UN agencies in Rome. With your support, we will continue our work to ensure American leadership in addressing food insecurity and rule of law around the world.

Thank you.