**General Statement delivered by South Africa on behalf of the African Group**

**3rd Session of the Open-Ended Working Group on the**

**Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas**

**17 May 2016**

***Check against delivery***

Chairperson,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Group.

The African Group wishes to congratulate H.E Ambassador Suxo Iturry for her election as Chairperson-Rapporteur and assure you of our support.

Chairperson,

The African Group supports the mandate of this Working Group which is to address the fundamental issue of the elaboration of a Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and People Working in Rural Areas. This is a matter of priority for the African Group as the majority of our people still retain a rural livelihood and are engaged in subsistence farming with agriculture being one of the largest contributors to GDP.

Africa and agriculture are mutually bound by a strong bond of a developmental agenda for the continent with African States. Countries developed detailed strategies, increased public-sector investment, and elevated political commitment supported by the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The CAADP was effectively launched through the AU 2003 Maputo Declaration with a view to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty through agriculture. To do this, African Governments have undertaken to increase public investment in agriculture and raise agricultural productivity. The programme further proposes four key pillars on which agricultural policies should focus on, in order to increase agricultural productivity and clearly recognises the crucial role of “small scale and traditional farmers in rural areas” and the need to increase their engagement in agricultural policies. Other continental efforts are also being committed to unlock the socio-economic and political potential of the continent, including Agenda 2063.

Chairperson,

Family, small-scale and traditional farming are inextricably linked to world food security. According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development, small scale farmers are most responsible for feeding the world today and this is one of the important reasons for investing in rural people and in rural transformation, while ensuring their empowerment is a highly effective way of reducing hunger and poverty. Tackling the scourge of hunger is the most basic necessity for developmental success because inclusive growth, social equity and sustainable development will not happen on empty stomachs.

Those envisaged for coverage by the Declaration have suffered historic and persistent discrimination in many countries around the globe, and the existing international protection mechanisms of their rights and sustainable livelihoods are insufficient to overcome their situation of poverty and underdevelopment. It is therefore necessary to address these normative gaps under international human rights law.

The vulnerabilities of the small scale, traditional and family farmers, which are precipitated by the phenomenon of globalisation make it absolutely necessary for the Human Rights Council to take appropriate interventions to protect, promote and fulfill their rights. Rural communities have to take center stage in all development initiatives, and be key subjects to their own development.

The African Group thus looks forward to constructive and fruitful discussions during the Session.

I thank you.

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