**Susan Longley, International officer – agriculture and plantations**

**On behalf of:**

**The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF).**

**La Unión Internacional de Trabajadores de la Alimentación, Agrícolas, Hoteles, Restaurantes, Tabaco y Afines, (UITA).**

Ladies and gentleman,

First, let me say a few words about my organization – the IUF.

The IUF is an international federation of trade unions representing workers employed in agriculture and plantations; the preparation and manufacture of food and beverages and in food services.  We currently have 396 affiliated organizations in 125 countries. Our affiliates are trade union representing workers throughout the food chain - these are people who are employed – they do not own the land they work nor usually the tools the work with.

The IUF welcomes the decision on the UN HCR to work on a Declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. We wish specifically to comment here on the situation of agricultural workers and in particular the decent work deficits they face every day – which we hope the Declaration will fully address. I therefore want to speak briefly about the employment characteristics of the agricultural sector and to remind the OEWG that over 40% of those working in agriculture are employed – some 440 million people – so it is crucial their situation is addressed.

I have to put on record that the agricultural sector is regrettably characterised by significant decent work deficits. Agricultural workers are often denied access to even the basic of rights covered in the ILO’s core conventions in particular to freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively.

This is not just my view as a trade unionist – a report from the ILO for the 2008 International Labour Conference Committee on ***Promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction*** stated.

“Globally, rural workers still form the largest workforce. While improvements havebeen made in the protection of agricultural workers in some countries, in many others, they are not covered by labour legislation and other regulations protecting workers.
Furthermore, where laws do exist, lack of resources and political will to enforce the provisions as well as isolation, poor literacy, poverty and lack of organization, often prevent workers from fully asserting their rights. The labour protection gap for these workers remains huge……”

We therefore welcome the recognition in Article 11 in the draft declaration of the importance of freedom of association.

For the IUF – for the global trade movement – the right to organize is the key enabling right that allows workers to come together to ensure they can properly access other rights. This right to organize in trade unions is clearly recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 makes that clear when it specifically says workers can freely form and join unions. So whether workers have rights or do not have rights is not what we need to or even have a right to address. It is whether they can in practice access and exercise those rights.

We recognise that the new declaration already gives guidance on this –in particular the need to extend labour legislation to agricultural workers.

We also welcome the recognitions in the new draft of addressing health and safety in the workplace. Agriculture is alongside mining and construction one of the most dangerous industries to work in – with according to the ILO – the highest rate of fatal accidents. Families who lose a bread winner to a fatal accident at work are very likely to be plunged even deeper into poverty and have their right to food completely undermined.

In summary chair we welcome the new declaration and its comprehensive and inclusive approach to rights for peasants and rural workers.