**Third Session of the open-ended intergovernmental working group on United Nations declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas**

**(17-20 May 2016)**

**EU general statement – v 17-05-16**

Madam Chair, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the EU for the duration of the third session of this working group. Allow me first of all to congratulate you with your election as Chair-Rapporteur of this Working Group. Please be assured of the EU’s support for you in your work.

Madam Chair,

As we have stated on previous occasions, the EU attaches great importance to the situation and the human rights of persons living and working in rural areas. The EU remains deeply concerned by the fact that there are still significant inequalities with regard to the full realization of all human rights, in particular economic, social and cultural rights, between persons living in rural and persons living in urban areas.

It is the obligation of every State to ensure the promotion and protection of all human rights without discrimination. To this end, the EU contributes significantly to national efforts through development assistance, seeking to improve the situation of persons living in rural areas.  The EU recognizes that challenges faced by people living and working in rural areas around the world need to be addressed, and we consider this Working Group an important opportunity to discuss how the existing international human rights framework can be used to improve the promotion and effective implementation of the rights of those living and working in rural areas, and to discuss how that framework can be used more effectively.

Madam Chair,

We would like to thank you for circulating the revised draft declaration well advance of this session and for the consultation process that you led. The EU, notwithstanding our procedural concerns with this initiative, has constructively engaged in the first two sessions of the Working Group. While our concerns remain we are ready to continue our constructive engagement in the session before us, although we do not agree that the Draft Declaration presented is the appropriate response to address the challenges faced by people working and living in rural areas.

The EU believes that the existing normative human rights framework is adequate and that people working and living in rural areas first of all need proper implementation of the existing framework, not new standards. As we have stated before, we would very much welcome an assessment of how the existing human rights framework has been applied to people working and living in rural areas, the reasons for the lack of implementation, and practical guidelines on how best to remedy this situation. We have also taken note of the fact that the background study, which the OHCHR, through Resolution 30/13, was requested to prepare before this session is not yet available. The EU hopes that this study, when available, will help to provide the assessment that we believe is needed.

Madam Chair,

We believe it is important to clearly acknowledge for the record that the divergent views on the value added of a new declaration remain. While, for the reasons outlined above, the EU is not in the position to support a new declaration and will therefore need to reserve its position on the entire text, we are, in the spirit of constructive engagement, ready to participate in the discussions this week and raise some general and some specific comments on the draft text, without prejudice to our overall position.

In closing, Madam Chair, let me reiterate the EU’s support for you in your work and express the EU’s hope that this Working Group will be able to make progress this week towards the goal of an improvement in the human rights situation of  persons living and working in rural areas.

Thank you.