

Open letter to the President of the Council, in favor of the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas

29 September 2017

Excellency,

On the occasion of the presentation of the report of the 4th session of the Open Ended intergovernmental working group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas at the 36th session of the Human Rights Council, we* call on States to renew the mandate of the working group so that it can finalize its works. The working group has developed a draft declaration to protect and promote the individual and collective rights of this often forgotten group in increasingly vulnerable situations.

As the Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council has found, smallholder farmers, landless people, tenant farmers, agricultural labourers including migrant workers, and people living from traditional fishing, hunting and herding activities are among the most discriminated and vulnerable people in many parts of the world. Every year, thousands of peasant farmers are the victims of expropriation of land, forced evictions and displacements. At the same time, traditional fishing communities are increasingly threatened by the industrialization of fishing activities. People living from hunting activities and pastoralists, experience recurring conflicts with farmers over land and water resources. It is estimated that these peasants make up 80 per cent of the world's hungry. Peasant women are particularly affected by poverty, largely as a result of discrimination in access to and control over productive resources, such as land, water and access to credit.¹

We would like to highlight that a UN Declaration would constitute a milestone in enhancing the visibility and thus the protection of this group of vulnerable persons. The Declaration will enable the codification of the human rights of peasants and other persons working in rural areas and encourage implementation at local level. We endorse this development of international law in the field of human rights.²

The adoption and implementation of the Declaration would also advance the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, by reducing poverty, and hunger through the

¹ Language from the Final Study of the Advisory Committee A/HRC/19/75, para 75.

² United Nations /RES/60/251 Article 5 (c)

His Excellency

Mr. Joaquín Alexander Maza Martelli,

Permanent Representative of El Salvador to the United Nations Office at Geneva

President of the Human Rights Council, Eleventh Cycle (2017)

promotion of small and family agriculture, which according to FAO provides approximately 80% of worldwide food consumption. This will further have a positive contribution for the protection of the environment.

We would like to salute the constructive negotiation, broad participation and active engagement of Governments, regional groups, civil society, intergovernmental organizations, experts and relevant stakeholders including peasants' organizations, at the fourth session of the working group.³ The effective participation of peasants and other people working in rural areas in the definition of policies that affect them, and in the determination of food systems is important in insuring food security, food sovereignty and the right to food for all.

We further encourage States, civil society and other relevant stakeholders to uphold the promotion and protection of human rights above purely economic and commercial considerations, including the intellectual property regime, in order to arrive at a more just, solidary, democratic and equitable international order.

We call on Governments, international organizations, in particular international financial institutions, and other stakeholders to endorse this UN Declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas with a view to its adoption by the UN General Assembly.

We would kindly request that this open letter be shared with all Member States. We further inform you that a version of this letter will be posted on the web pages of our respective mandates.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Alfred de Zayas

Independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order

Ms. Hilal Elver

Special Rapporteur on Right to Food

Mr. Obiora C. Okafor

Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity

³ Language from the conclusions of the 4th session of the working group

(*) The experts: Mr. Alfred de Zayas, Independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; Mr. Obiora C. Okafor, Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity; Ms. Hilal Elver, Special Rapporteur on Right to Food.