



**Statement by the Spokesperson  
for the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Consultation**

**FAO Thirty-third Regional Conference for Europe  
Łódź, Poland , 10--13 May 2022**

*Ambassadors, distinguished delegates, FAO representatives,*

Thank you very much for giving me the floor.

My name is Olena Borodina, I come from Kyiv, Ukraine and I am speaking as a representative of Civil Society, on behalf of Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia Food Sovereignty Network that brings together all the CSO constituencies: small-scale farmers, pastoralists, small scale and artisanal fisher people, Indigenous Peoples, migrant and agricultural workers, consumers, NGOs as well as rural women and youth in our Region.

**The Ukrainian people** are forever grateful for the solidarity and support shown by the countries and the people from Europe and all around the world, during the most atrocious humanitarian crisis in Europe since the second World War, as a result of the war started by the totalitarian government of the Russian Federation against the sovereign state of Ukraine since 2014, which was further escalated into a **full-scale military invasion** on the 24th of February 2022.

In 76 days since this invasion, the small-scale farmers of Ukraine and their tractors became known as front line heroes all around the world. Millions of Ukrainian small-scale farmers and peasants are bravely defending our territory. At the same time, they continue to be the backbone of the food security of Ukraine, by feeding millions of vulnerable people in occupied or liberated territories. Women of Ukraine were faced with the traumatic choice of leaving their homes, their villages, or staying to fight or participate in the humanitarian response. The sexual violence against Ukrainian women, girls and boys, many of them from rural areas, will remain the most unforgivable wound inflicted by the most cruel form of patriarchy.

Before the war, before 2018 - 2020, small scale farmers and peasants produced the overwhelming majority of food consumed in Ukraine on local and territorial markets (producing over 90% of potatoes, over 80% of vegetables, fruits and berries, over 70% of milk, over 40% of eggs and over 30% of meat). During this extreme crisis, the small-scale farmers have been the fastest to adapt to the needs of millions of people internally displaced by the war and to the changing market conditions that face shortages of inputs and energy and historic rise of prices. Small scale farmers from Ukraine and from our region use agroecology and short food chains very effectively to respond to the food crisis as also happened during the first phases of the COVID-19 pandemic period when the long food chains collapsed. They deserve to become the priority for all governments and decision makers at all levels in our region, in emergency programs, in public policies for food and agriculture and in medium- and long-term strategies.

We express solidarity with victims of conflicts from other countries and territories from our region and around the world, facing severe human rights violations, including the fundamental right to life.

Globally and in Europe and Central Asia, rural society has been impacted by **multiple crises**, each of them aggravating the effects of the others. The climate crisis already had been affecting the livelihoods of small-scale family farmers and impacting biodiversity and soil. The COVID-19 pandemic, a global health problem, aggravated existing economic and social inequalities. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has generated a humanitarian crisis and has threatened food security for the people on the ground and for low-income

countries who depend on Ukrainian imports of food. Increases in food and energy prices continue to generate more vulnerabilities related to the loss of employment, access to healthy affordable food, and the realisation of human rights. One of the most recent crimes of the Russian army has been the appropriating of hundreds of thousands of tons of grain and agricultural machinery from Ukraine's temporary occupied territories. We urge the international community to pay attention and to take appropriate measures.

Although the small-scale food producers are there, working on the land and the sea, there are many difficulties accessing seeds and other means of production. For instance, fishing for the Black Sea fishing communities is practically impossible due to the actions, activities and the pollution caused by the Russian military forces. Many naval mines are also drifting free in the Black Sea, which also makes it very dangerous for fishing boats to go to sea. This has not only affected the lives and livelihoods of fishers, it has also resulted in a shortage of fresh fish which provides a crucial source of nutrients to local communities.

These ongoing crises demonstrate the *importance of strengthening local food systems* and of reducing dependence on food imports. Small-scale family farmers, agricultural workers, fishers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples who have proven to be resilient throughout these crises, are instrumental in elevating human rights in food and agriculture – a key element in building sustainable food security.

**Food security** exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. "**Food sovereignty** is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations." The differences between these two concepts are accentuated in times of war and social or political unrest. On one hand, the primary need becomes the simple right of access to food and water that determines the very existence of human life. In a period of military conflict, humanitarian aid that provides food and water to those most in need is based on food security.

However, food security in and by itself cannot provide a response to the underlying issues addressed by food sovereignty. Other aspects are also essential, including short food chains which help build resilient territorial markets and agroecology which helps preserve and increase biodiversity and healthy soil and environmentally friendly production by placing people and their movements at the centre and with its request for societal change, as recommended in the FAO 10 Elements of Agroecology. At the height of the COVID-19 crisis, those territories that turned to agroecological food production were the most resilient, especially where civil society organised and short food chains, both old and new were prominent. Such chains have proved their resilience, and today's situation of growing food insecurity can be largely overcome by territorial actions that develop food self-sufficiency and food sovereignty at local level. This implies a major shift from WTO-based commodification, speculation and long food chains to a social solidarity economy where the markets are regulated and policies support small scale producers and consumers in short food chains, cooperatives (including consumer cooperative shops and other local solidarity partnerships between producers and consumers), local public procurement that ensures healthy school meals for children. Local authority support is key to achieving these goals. There are many examples of good practice in our region, and these must be collected, scaled up and disseminated. Because we believe that this is the path to building sustainable local and territorial food systems and healthy diets and to overcoming the growing hunger in our region.

These are key to fresh, local, healthy and nutritious food production – which must be accessible to all – and to decent living for all who work the land and the sea, including both farmers and land workers and fishers and fish workers.

Wars, social exclusion, economic hardship and the search for better living conditions are forcing millions of people to cross international boundaries. In the agricultural sector this situation has led to the exploitation of **seasonal and migrant food and agricultural workers**, with employers profiting from the unfavourable legal condition of undocumented workers, intensifying the race to lower salaries and lower labour standards that in many cases pit national citizens against immigrants. The volume of work in these production areas is no longer

controlled by the laws of agronomy but only by the demands and responses of the “market”, of distribution, which brings uncertainties and insecurity for seasonal workers. We need to seek an end to the precariousness of the status of seasonal and other food chain workers- whether documented or not. We need to seek to promote a model of agriculture and fisheries that respects all its workers and the environment and implement Decent Work for all.

**Indigenous Peoples**, despite the ever-increasing pressure and hostility from the corporate-driven industrial food system, continue to feed their communities. This includes provision of school meals that respect the food sovereignty and diets of Indigenous Peoples.

During the most acute days of the COVID-19 crisis, IP communities quickly adapted to new conditions, continued to feed their communities with fresh, healthy, nutritious food, and also found creative solutions to connect directly with wider populations. They continue to protect and support local, resilient traditional food systems, and work together for a global transition in line with UNDRIP at all levels.

**Women and youth** represent a priority and a pillar of strength for social movements involved in agriculture and food production. They need to be included in the representation and leadership of policy processes in our region, at all levels.

Our region already suffers from a significant **climate crisis**. Some of the most significant phenomena from our region include: a) huge fires are already burning in Siberia, far earlier than last year; b) severe drought affecting many countries - particularly Central Asian countries; c) mudflow, hail and dust storms destroy the fields and the crops; d) mountain areas are increasingly vulnerable to the climate change effects. As civil society, we believe that agroecology and the selection and preservation of traditional seed varieties provide far greater resilience than any new genetic modification techniques.

**Agroecology** and organic agriculture promote a healthier nutritious diet that focuses on more vegetables and pulses and good quality meat and dairy products. Agroecology further builds autonomy, and tools to transform society, supports independent local bottom-up food scapes for rural and urban areas that supply their regions with healthy, nutritional food resources and strong knowledge in the population on healthy food choices.

Fishery policy should also be at the heart of climate action: ending overfishing and promoting low impact fisheries will boost ocean resilience to climate change. Sustainable fisheries and the well-being of coastal and riverine fishing communities, who supply fresh fish on a daily basis contributing to food security of local communities, livelihoods, social cohesion and cultural heritage, must be at the heart of fishery policy. We applaud and are happy to recognise the fact that the Saami people have recently won the right to uphold their access to traditional fishing and hunting grounds in our region.

At the crossroads of climate action and ensuring food sovereignty, land and fisheries policies must be undertaken to reverse the disappearance of smallholders. Rogue capitalism, pension funds, totalitarian regimes and unfair policies have long induced further concentration of land and fishing rights and land and ocean grabbing which lead to destructive resource management practices endangering environment, biodiversity and communities' rights. We recall here that land and fishing rights should not be a commodity but a right encompassing a key social dimension and cannot be subject to the law of markets. Existing tools such as UN Declaration of Peasants and Other People Living in Rural Areas (UNDROP) and the Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure (VGGT) and the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines (VGSSF) must be the basis for land and fisheries policies. The latter are needed to end land and ocean grabbing, to favour access to land and fishing rights for women and youth, to enhance small-scale farming and fisheries and agroecology as sustainable land and fishing practices which will be of utmost importance in preserving biodiversity, soil health, in fighting climate change and in ensuring communities' rights and dignity.

It is now well documented that the industrial food system is too costly to the planet, with its dependence on fossil-fuels, minerals for high-tech machineries and synthetic chemicals, with its heavy exploitation of soil, water, marine resources, genetic resources, and labour, as well as its health costs. In fact, it has brought the whole life on the planet to the brink of destruction.

IPCC has warned us all about the impact of wars and military conflicts on the environment. As civil society we wish to emphasise the immense costs paid now and in the future and the extended implications of wars and conflicts with fossil fuels and other toxic industries.

Distinguished delegates, we strongly demand the FAO REU and Member States to make all efforts at all levels to **STOP THE WAR against Ukraine** and ensure immediate humanitarian support to all the people affected by the war. Ukrainian small scale farmers and peasants organisations need to be included with priority in the process of response to the crisis caused by the war: food security, humanitarian, economic and much more. If this war and any conflict will not stop, if peace is not realised, then this is just an empty process and nothing on our agenda will ever be achieved.

Before sharing our recommendations we would like to express our appreciation for our long standing partnership with FAO REU and many thanks to the governments for the space that was given to civil society organisations in the ministerial regional conference.

For all the reasons presented above, human rights, agroecology and relocalization of food systems must be prioritised as solutions in the implementation of the **FAO strategic framework 2022-31**, fully engaging the Civil Society Organisations and Indigenous Peoples during the entire process.

In order to realise **human rights** in food and agriculture, for the benefit of the entire society, we need to strongly promote and work for the implementation of all human rights instruments, using also the framework of the UN Decade for Family Farming, with a particular focus on the followings:

- The UN Declaration for the Rights of Peasants and Other People working in rural areas;
- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- The Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women - CEDAW

States should ensure that the implementation of various international agreements to which they are a party, will not violate **the rights of peasants and indigenous peoples to the natural resources** (seeds, water, land, biodiversity) and promote, respect, protect and fulfil these human rights that are fundamental.

We strongly recommend to governments to re-commit and further engage in agreements, and policies that push for programmes fostering biodiversity, models based on **agroecology** and reduction of artificial fertiliser and synthetic pesticides in Europe and Central Asia. We need these solutions in order to respond to the multiple crises that we face at regional and global level, and to build sustainable food security.