

ADVOCACY NOTE ON THE PROMOTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNDROP

(UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF PEASANTS AND OTHER PEOPLE WORKING IN RURAL AREAS)

INTRODUCTION:

Peasants and other people working in rural areas are the most important food producers in the world. They feed the global population – according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), they provide between 75% and 80% of the global food supply – yet they are alarmingly affected by poverty and hunger. Peasants, who account for up to 70% of people living in extreme poverty, often work under hazardous and exploitative conditions.

Hundreds of millions of peasants and other people working in rural areas, such as small farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fishers, landless rural workers, nomads and Indigenous Peoples working the land, have historically faced, and still face, multiple forms of discrimination, marginalization, and systematic human rights violations. Because they are categorized as independent workers, they are systematically excluded from labor rights protection and social security systems, making them more vulnerable to exploitation, repression, and climate hazards and disasters.

Peasants and other people working in rural areas are particularly affected by the multiple current crises. The climate crisis, the environmental degradation and the food crisis threaten the livelihoods of millions of peasants globally. However, peasants play a crucial role in preserving biodiversity and ecosystems, and in responding to the climate crises. The industrial food system, on the other hand, is a major driver of the climate emergency, and of social disruption in rural areas.

The contributions made by peasants become especially relevant in times of multidimensional crises, particularly in the face of challenges related to the environmental, health and food crises. They provide diverse and healthy food at the local level, eliminating the need for long, complex, and environmentally costly value chains. The knowledge that peasants have developed over centuries can inform the practical steps we must take toward a much-needed just transition, which is essential for our planet's survival and wellbeing. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People

Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) is a powerful instrument to safeguard and strengthen peasants' rights. This means that the implementation of UNDROP, both at national and international levels, is a key element in addressing the impacts of these multidimensional crises.

Since the adoption of the Declaration, some States have advanced on the implementation of UNDROP at national level. However, there has been no monitoring of its implementation at the international level, while structural causes that led to the adoption of UNDROP, such as various forms of discrimination, systematic human rights violations and historical disadvantages, continue to be ignored.

In light of this situation:

- **It is high time that States systematically protect, promote and respect** the rights enshrined in UNDROP by taking measures to translate its content into national legal frameworks, as well as to develop institutions, programs and policies accordingly, and thus implement its provisions.
- **Peasant and rural organizations**, together with allies from other civil society organizations (CSOs), **must support a broader effort to take ownership of UNDROP through training and awareness raising efforts. They must advocate its implementation** and mobilize to urge their respective authorities to embark on this path.
- The implementation of UNDROP must also be promoted at the international level: to this end, **the creation of an international follow-up mechanisms on peasants' rights**, in the form of a **UN Special procedure**,¹ is a prerequisite. A UN Special procedure for UNDROP would further monitor, raise awareness, and promote the implementation of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas worldwide.

¹ The special procedures of the Human Rights Council are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. They are non-paid and elected for three-year mandates that can be renewed for another three years. For more information, please see: www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures-human-rights-council

HOW CAN A NEW UN SPECIAL PROCEDURE PROMOTE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNDROP?

Since the adoption of UNDROP, efforts have been undertaken to implement this instrument at all levels, as well as to include it in the agenda of work of existing Special procedures and other UN bodies. For instance, peasant organizations and their allies advocated to include a perspective on the implementation of UNDROP in the framework of the UN Decade of Family Farming, which is co-led by the FAO. They also worked to integrate the promotion of UNDROP in the agendas of existing Special procedures whose mandates are closely related to peasants' rights, the right to food and nutrition, the environment, climate change, and freedom of association, among others.

However, **existing thematic mandates allow us to grasp peasants' rights only from one specific perspective.** They are thus **not enough to coherently tackle the issue of peasants' rights in a holistic and systematic manner** that encompasses all rights and issues covered by UNDROP, as well as the interconnected causes that lead to violations of peasants' and other rural peoples' rights. Instead, as peasants' rights constitute a wider conglomerate of interrelated rights, a specific Special procedure would enable a comprehensive understanding of the challenges peasants face, and the ways in which they contribute to the enjoyment of human rights among both rural and urban populations, and more generally, of how to advance in the realization of their human rights.

A **UN Special procedure** (which can take the form of a Working Group of Experts or a Special Rapporteur) will play an **important role in promoting peasants' rights at the international level and in monitoring and reporting on the progress made by States in fulfilling their obligations under UNDROP. It will also advise States – jointly and/or individually – about the implementation of their human rights obligations, with a focus on peasants and other rural people.**

Furthermore, a Special procedure dedicated to peasants' rights will increase the Human Rights Council's understanding and knowledge on how to connect the realization of peasants' rights with urgent issues, such as the response to the current multiple crises. It will also aid in responding to key discussions from a peasant's perspective on, inter alia, the just transition, the challenges of digitalization, and human mobility and migration.

In order to fulfil these tasks, the future Special procedure will have the mandate to:



MONITOR

Visit those countries that require special attention regarding the implementation of UNDROP; and meet the local authorities competent to implement peasants' and other rural peoples' rights, along with peasant movements and supporting CSOs.



RAISE AWARENESS

Raise public awareness about UNDROP, peasants' rights, their contributions to humanity, lessons learned and good practices on the implementation of peasants' and other rural peoples' rights, inter alia drafting public statements and reports to follow up on the situation of peasants' rights in different countries; identifying challenges and opportunities; and advising governments on how to advance on the implementation of their human rights obligations with a focus on peasants' rights.



ADVISE

Provide advice on technical cooperation at country, regional and international levels, contributing to the development of national public policies, programs and institutions that strengthen the realization of human rights with a focus on peasants and other rural people.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Formulate concrete recommendations for States, based on reports and claims previously submitted by peasant and rural organizations along with other CSOs, in order to: report violations of peasants' rights; recommend ways to better implement peasants' rights (overcoming challenges and obstacles); and promote the drafting of policies and national legislations on the protection of peasants' rights.



INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND MAINSTREAMING PEASANTS' RIGHTS ISSUES

- Contribute to the development of international human rights standards that strengthen States' compliance with their existing human rights obligations, from the perspective of peasants and other rural people.
- Furthermore, a Special procedure serves as a forum for discussion and cooperation between countries, for exchanging good practices, and as a space to coordinate ideas and proposals on implementation across countries. At the same time, the space will allow direct dialogue and articulation between countries' representatives, the rights holders (peasants and other rural communities) and other CSOs working on the promotion of UNDROP.

SUMMARY

In sum, a Special procedure within the UN Human Rights Council will create a space to support the implementation of States' human rights obligations through the lens of UNDROP at local and national levels, while promoting its mainstreaming at all levels.

By reporting on human rights violations and monitoring implementation in different countries, a UN Special procedure on peasants' rights will support governments and, when needed, pressure them to take action to address the issues and promote the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.

In order to fulfil this objective, peasant and rural organizations and movements, in collaboration with their allies, must take ownership of this future mechanism, i.e., recognize and acknowledge its utility; disseminate it in respective networks; be able to explain the procedure; and develop strategies to use it. They need to be ready to subsequently feed it by, for instance, submitting reports and complaints about violations; and engaging with respective State authorities in the provided spaces. This will enable peasants – who are often ignored by our societies – to become more visible; to strengthen their dignity; and to continue fostering their participation in local, national and global governance.