

## **UN Human Rights Council: Event on good practices, lessons learned and challenges in the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants**

*La Via Campesina*

*CETIM*

*FIAN International*

*Geneva Academy for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights*

**The 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2022, in the framework of the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, an important [side-event on the issue of peasants' rights](#) took place at Villa Moynier, a historic villa in the hearth of Geneva, today the siege of the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights.**

The Permanent Missions of Bolivia, South Africa and Luxembourg at the UN, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland and the Office of the High Commissioner organized this event for Human Rights, together with La Via Campesina, CETIM, FIAN International, the Geneva Academy and the South Centre. A very broad and representative spectrum of organizations and entities, showing the importance that this key issue plays in the human rights system.

Dr. Christophe Golay from the Geneva Academy opened the discussion by recalling that the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) in 2018 by the UN General Assembly is a historic step in the promotion and protection of the human rights of peasants and other people living in rural areas, who are the main victims of poverty, hunger, inequalities and climate change.

H.E. Maira Macdonal, the Ambassador of the Plurinational State of Bolivia at the UN in Geneva, acted as moderator of the event. In her introduction, Ambassador Macdonal mentioned the importance of co-organizing the event with countries that played a fundamental role in the elaboration of the UNDROP, namely South Africa, which was in the core-group of States that promoted the adoption of the Declaration, as well as Luxembourg and Switzerland, which, together with Portugal, are the only Western States that voted in favour of the Declaration.

The Ambassador of Bolivia pointed out that today, while we are entering the phase of the UNDROP's implementation, we are facing new challenges ahead that have to be tackled collectively. After her introduction, H.E. Freddy Mamani, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia, who attended the meeting via zoom, reaffirmed Bolivia's commitment to the peasant struggle and called for a reinforcement of the rights of peasants. Freddy Mamani underlined that the normative framework provided by the Declaration is key to respond to the current food crisis, amongst many other progressive developments that it could foster.

After Vice-Minister Freddy Mamani, H.E. Mxolisi Nkosi, the Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the UN in Geneva, took the floor. He started by highlighting the importance of articulating the implementation of both peasants' rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Declaration on the Right to Development. Ambassador Nkosi highlighted that 43% of the South African population lives in rural areas, which hold some of the poorest

communities in the country. He continued by saying that “the state of rural communities is a constant reminder of the results of apartheid and colonialism”. This is why South Africa considers that the UNDROP is a key instrument to ensure that rural areas will stop being a constant supply of cheap labour. He added that the government must continue to combat unemployment and inequitable access to land in rural areas.

H.E. Marc Bichler, the Ambassador of Luxembourg to the UN in Geneva, portrayed the UNDROP’s adoption as the result of a successful collaboration between civil society and States. He reminded participants that at the very beginning of the process, Luxembourg and Portugal were the only States from the Global North to support the UNDROP’s elaboration. Ambassador Bichler enumerated four reasons which explain why his country supported the UNDROP’s adoption and why it will continue to support its implementation: 1) it was a request and a need raised by civil society; 2) it was an opportunity to put all (already recognized) rights of peasants in one document and adapt them to the needs of rural communities; 3) it was consistent with Luxembourg's development cooperation; and 4) today, these three arguments are still valid, and in addition the vulnerability of peasants has increased since 2018.

Prof. Michael Fakhri, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, made a presentation online. He explained that, even if the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian/Ukrainian conflict made it even worse, the rising of global hunger has been going on for a minimum of eight years. He underlined that the UNDROP helps in understanding our food systems, providing a useful framework to foster much needed multilateral cooperation. He described the UNDROP as one of the most important legal advances in the last decades, and as a key instrument to build sustainable and equitable food systems. According to him, it is now critical to engage the rest of the States towards the UNDROP’s implementation.

Following up, Ms. Fatouma Seid, Deputy Director of Partnerships and UN Collaboration at the FAO highlighted that we are facing a multi-diverse crisis. As the pandemic has stricken the world, the many ways to obtain food have been endangered. She reminded us that the number of hungry people in the world is increasing, with 811 million people who are struggling to find food, 45 million who are on the verge of starvation, while 80% of them work in rural areas. She also underlined that there is plenty of data explaining the huge and difficult challenges that small farmers, women and children face. She also asked participants to recognize that this crisis has helped us to strengthen and build resilience, and that it is now crucial to share experiences and good practices in order to promote the transformation that we want at an international scale. Family farmers have a fundamental role to play in ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources. The UNDROP can be instrumental for this and it should be linked to the Plan of action of the UN Decade of Family Farming.

Ms. Naéla Gabr, member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), affirmed in her speech clear support for the UNDROP. She expressed gratitude for the engagement and goodwill of UN mechanisms (such as the Special Rapporteur M. Fakhri), UN agencies (like the FAO), States and CSOs to push for the UNDROP’s implementation. In her speech, she made clear bridges between the UNDROP and the work developed by CEDAW. She mentioned, for example, the importance of CEDAW’s General Recommendation no. 34, which is crucial because it aims to better promote and protect rural women's rights. She added that what applies to

rural women could easily be applied to rural men. She also affirmed that it is frustrating to see that powerful countries are giving lessons on human rights when they are not endorsing new important human rights instruments (as the UNDROP).

Ms. Morgan Ody, the General Coordinator of La Vía Campesina, was the last panellist to take the floor. She started by explaining that the UNDROP has been translated to many different languages, which can be considered as a great success, and she added that different types of training and communication work has been developed about it. For La Vía Campesina, the main goal is now to reach the greatest possible number of peasants in the world, so that they fully understand the UNDROP, and start to use it. She indicated that the UNDROP is already having a very powerful impact in certain countries, including in Nepal, Colombia and Chile.

For Ms. Morgan Ody, it is very clear that at the international level, we need a new Special Procedure of the Human Rights Council on the rights of peasants, such as a Working Group of Experts or a UN Special Rapporteur, to support the UNDROP's implementation. This new mechanism will serve as a follow-up mechanism of the UNDROP, allowing for the monitoring of the situation in the different countries, and providing a space for discussion and exchange of ideas on good practices between States and between States and civil society organizations (in particular those representatives of the rights holders). In conclusion, she called on all countries to support peasant communities and to engage in the creation of this new UN monitoring mechanism.

Watch the recording of the side-event [here](#).