Dear distinguished members,

I, Hilal Elver, Special Rapporteur on the right to food urge states to support the adoption of the Declaration for the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. It's my belief that the imminent adoption of the Declaration will be a significant sign of progress, a proof of the serious and urgent preoccupation of international community for building solutions to eliminate hunger and malnutrition as well as poverty and promote sustainability in agriculture and food production.

It is time for the international community to look to the future and establish what more can be done to ensure an enabling environment for people to produce and access food in a dignified manner. Indeed it is the responsibility of all States, individually and through international co-operation, to create and implement sustainable agriculture and food systems. The Declaration will play a key role in the realization of the right to adequate food for all, because of its unique, inclusive and transparent process, which involved governments, UN agencies and the right holders (with the meaningful and representative participation of peasants, pastoralists, fisher folks, indigenous people, food and rural workers etc.).

The Declaration serves not only peasants and people working in rural areas as major food providers but also consumers, given its holistic approach. The Declaration is not devoted to defending a particular group. It is about defending an agricultural model, whose existence needs defending at this time. Peasant agriculture contributes to agro-biodiversity, supports the development of rural areas as well as contributes to the implementation of the SDGs. Worldwide, the vast majority of the poor and hungry live in rural areas and depend directly or indirectly on "small scale family farming" that is being destroyed by export oriented industrial agriculture, causing increasing levels of poverty among peasants populations in rural areas. At the same time peasants and other people working in rural areas have a crucial role in the provision of health and nutritious food throughout the world. According to the FAO, most of the food consumed locally is provided by small farmholders, fishers and pastoralists. In addition, the, peasantry constitutes a source of livelihood for thousands of families around the world, and it should be observed that women play a key role in this process. The Declaration puts an appropriate emphasis on particularly vulnerable sectors of society: women, youth, migrants, children, indigenous peoples and minorities. It thus supplements existing international standards protecting vulnerable living in rural areas.

The Declaration is consistent with and will reinforce the realization of Decade for Family Farming and the Decade for Nutrition, both instruments having been widely approved by the UNGA.

The Declaration is based on existing international standards related to the rights of peasants people working in rural areas. These standards are set forth in the UN Treaties and Agreements and by FAO Voluntary Guidelines and Policy Products negotiated by the UN member states in the Global Committee for Food Security. It includes civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, for individuals and communities, as well as the relevant obligations of States.

The recognition of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas is urgent, taking into account the increasing challenges that haven been documented by the Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council. These include, increasing poverty and hunger, the concentration of food systems in few hands, land expropriations, increased criminalization of peasant leaders, environmental degradation and toxic wastes, heavy pesticides use, and adverse impact of climate change.

States should uphold their human rights obligations, and advance the protection and promotion of human rights in rural areas to improve the living standards, as well as ensuring quality health, education, public services including water and sanitation, and facilitating the means of production by providing equitable and effective access to credits. Moreover, the obligations of states include the promotion of a healthy and clean environment along with the development of sustainable production and consumption patterns. In relation to these goals, agroecological practices have opportunities to make vital contributions if given the needed support.
As human rights experts we reiterate the call made by Ms. Kate Gilmore, Deputy High Commissioner of the OHCHR, to urgently adopt the Declaration in order to address the gap in protection currently affecting more than a billion people who are being subjected to poverty and discrimination as a result of these dysfunctional agricultural policies.

Peasants and other people living in rural areas are equal in dignity and rights to those residing in urban settings. It is imperative that the international community address the increasing poverty and hunger, which is also leading thousands of families to abandon rural areas every year in search of better material conditions bearing on their livelihoods.

In order to advance the implementation of the right to adequate food, priority must be given to the adoption of a comprehensive human rights based approach, responsive to the needs of people and fully responsive to considerations of food justice in all of its aspects. Improved global governance of the agricultural sphere is essential in the pursuit of a sustainable, just, equitable world. With these considerations in mind we urge that strong support be given to this Declaration. Only a widespread endorsement of this Declaration will rescue those now suffering from agricultural malpractice and enable these now deprived and threatened people to look toward the future with some hope.

Yours sincerely,