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Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Consultation

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1. I am *name*, from *country*, *organization*, a *brief description of organization*. Am honoured to stand here on behalf of 43 leaders from 26 CSOs from Asia Pacific, representing constituencies of small-scale farmers, landless, agricultural workers, fishers and fish workers, pastoralists and herders, forest dwellers, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, urban poor, consumers, NGOs, and, women and youth, who met last January in Bangkok, Thailand as our preparatory process for engagement in this year's Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
2. I looked forward to welcoming, all of you, especially my CSO colleagues, to our beautiful country, but then the Covid 19 pandemic happened and a virtual meeting has to be held instead. Unlike other countries, we have had our first nationwide lockdown only last August, as we were able to manage the spread of Covid 19. We too experienced the disruption in food supply, with volunteers distributing vegetables to ensure supply in Thimpu alongside government support to buy back produce from farmers to buffer farmer's income. We have yet to see the long-term impacts of the lockdown in Bhutan.
3. Globally, we have realized that the impacts of the pandemic are multi-dimensional, covering not only health, but also economic, food and nutrition security as well as peace and order. Our constituents, family farmers and rural communities in general, are among the first sectors who were dramatically affected, especially since the lockdowns happened during the peak harvest and planting season. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities in health, wealth, race and gender with those who have less in life and are lower in status being more affected as a consequence of loss of incomes and loss of livelihoods. All over Asia Pacific, there is a significant rise in unemployment. Economic analysts have already seen a slowdown in growth and a decline in economic activity, significantly hindering efforts to end poverty and hunger in the region where the world's most poor and hungry, mainly family farmers, are located. The pandemic happened just a year after a review of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), touting that SDG2 is the SDG most likely not to succeed.
4. There is a silver lining though in this pandemic. The health crisis made ordinary citizens realize again the value of farmers producing local, healthy food, and governments, of becoming more self-reliant in domestic agricultural production; of shorter and inclusive food and value chains. It has shown that it is with solidarity and cooperation that we can prevent another food and nutrition security crisis. Family farmers all over Asia Pacific became food frontliners and food heroes as they took initiatives to cope with the crisis: distributing emergency food packs for affected communities; establishing farmers' markets in partnership with homeowners' associations in the cities; online delivery of basic food especially rice; making and distribution of face masks; partnering with local government for emergency food procurement as well as distribution of seeds to farmers; providing assistance to repair handpumps; starting or continuing collective buying and selling centers as well as community-based processing activities for spices, root crops and several underutilized crops; policy dialogues with governments on priority responses to cope with the effects to farmers and agriculture; and last but not the least, continuing to farm through sustainable, resilient and agroecological approaches. In many Asia Pacific countries, it was local farmers, fisherfolk and producers, who fed most of us during the lockdown, when trade was suspended across and within countries.
5. Indeed, the current Covid 19 pandemic highlights our broken food system and exposes its underlying risks, fragilities and inequities. The crisis highlighted the need to create a better, more resilient, pandemic and climate proof food system. How to capture and apply lessons learned from the health crisis and build back better?
6. Definitely not "business as usual". The pandemic has proven once again that a highly industrialized food system endangers humanity. The strong influence of capitalists pushing for industrial agriculture marginalized the sustainable food production systems done by smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples.

7. The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, in its report “Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030” released several months ago, has called for a shift in the conceptual and policy framework on food security and nutrition. A food system that is sustainable, productive and prosperous, equitable and inclusive, empowering and respectful, resilient, regenerative, healthy and nutritious. A food security and nutrition policy that is approached within a sustainable food system framework underpinned by the right to food. A food system that strengthens the capacities of individuals -organized as groups , associations, cooperatives , movements – to make their own decisions about what foods they eat, what foods they produce, how that food is produced, processed and distributed within food systems, and their ability to engage in processes that shape food systems policies and governance.

8. It is in this framework that we call on FAO and its members to:

- a. Include smallholder family farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, forest-based communities, pastoralists, herders and all stewards of our diverse food systems “At the table, not on the menu”, in recognition of their role as equal actors in localizing sustainable food systems and nutrition. They must be ‘at the table’ not only because they are the most affected but also because they are solution providers, taking initiatives and experiments while building on their local and traditional wisdom.
- b. Provide platforms and mechanisms to enable organizations of producers and consumers to define and secure their own food systems and agroecology in accordance with FAO’s 10 elements of agroecology.
- c. Arrest the drivers of disruption of sustainable food systems and vulnerability, such as uneven trade agreements, including land-grabbing. Implement and apply the principles stated in the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of land, Fisheries and Forests and The Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems.
- d. Place a premium on programmes and services that protect and sustainably manage resources and the environment for long-term food sovereignty and resilience of food and agriculture systems. This includes protecting and securing peri-urban and urban agriculture and food systems and halting the unabated extraction of resources and disregard of the environment, which is the base of our food system. Mining, megadam construction, deforestation, air and water pollution makes us more vulnerable to food and health crisis.
- e. Strengthen the role of local governments in implementing sustainable food systems and nutrition as part of the current pandemic response, recovery and climate action. In particular, (1) enable local governments and other government agencies to directly procure from groups of small-scale producers; (2) include healthy produce in relief packages, instead of corporate, processed food; (3) support the advancement of community supported agriculture to shorten the food chain from producers and consumers.
- f. Promote traditional foods, particularly neglected and underutilized species present in local landscapes as they are usually of high nutritional value and can strengthen the immune system. These can be achieved through the domestication, cultivation, or integrated management of a much wider set of locally-important species for the development of a wide range of marketable natural products which can generate income for the rural and urban resource poor – as well as provide ecosystem services such as soil/water conservation.
- g. Recognize, protect and promote farmer’s innovations based on traditional and indigenous knowledge harnessing endogenous capacities and responding to local needs and situations.
- h. Establish farmers’ control over digital technology platforms to ensure farmer’s access, control and rights over seeds and breeds resulting from digitalization of agricultural

genetic resources, prevent the monopoly of technology and promote effective partnership of public-private-farmers in accordance with SDGs partnership framework

- i. Support documentation of farmers' innovations, respect the intellectual contributions of farmers over millennia and their free and prior informed consent on utilization of farmers' knowledge systems, and promote farmer-friendly and locally-appropriate systems for verification and certification of farmers' products made available in digital platforms.
- j. Address issues of water scarcity in farms and forests through a recognition of peoples' right to water, investments in community-based irrigation infrastructure, sustainable rainfed agriculture systems, and integrated water resources and ecosystems management and agro-ecological practices.
- k. Invest directly with organizations of small-scale family farmers and food producers in sustainable value chains of local foods, with strong involvement of farmers in processing, marketing, distribution and in the governance of these chains.
- l. Address the needs and challenges that women and young farmers face to allow them to benefit substantially from their work and contributions to promoting sustainable food systems.

9. We must act together. And together means including small-scale family farmers and food producers as partners and co-equals. When small-scale family farmers are regarded as key actors in repairing and strengthening food systems, we unleash the potential of millions of family farmers to implement the action plans of the UN Decade of Family Farming, promoting the UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants, which in turn will accelerate the achievement of the SDGs, especially SDG1 (no poverty) and SDG2 (end hunger, promote food security and sustainable agriculture), hopefully in this decade still.

10. Overall, we must re-examine our economic and society's measure of success – overconsumption and overproduction, as embodied in Gross National Product. As countries, societies and communities look for alternative economic models that center on people's wellbeing, allow me to direct you, and be inspired by the legacy of His Majesty, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo to the people of Bhutan - Gross National Happiness, a holistic approach to development that looks at sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, environmental conservation, preservation and promotion of culture and good governance. We enjoin FAO and member states to look at food systems, and broadly our economies in light of achieving gross national happiness.

11. Thank you for your attention. Tashi delek!