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منظمة  
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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

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### Statement by the Spokesperson for the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

**Ambassadors, distinguished delegates, representatives of FAO,**

**Thank you very much for giving me the floor.**

My name is Elena Borodina, and I am from Kyiv, Ukraine. I am speaking as a representative of civil society, on behalf of the Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia Food Sovereignty Network, which brings together all CSO groups: smallholder farmers, pastoralists, small-scale and artisanal fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples, migrant and rural workers, consumers, NGOs and rural women and youth in our region.

At the outset, we would like to thank the FAO REU for our longstanding partnership and the governments for the space given to Civil Society Organizations at this ministerial regional conference.

I would like to begin by stating that during this difficult time for Ukraine, the **Ukrainian People** express their infinite gratitude to the people and countries of Europe and the entire world for their solidarity and support during the most horrific humanitarian crisis that Europe has seen since the Second World War, as a result of the military aggression launched by the totalitarian government of the Russian Federation against the sovereign state of Ukraine in 2014, which escalated into a full-scale military invasion on 24 February 2022.

In the 76 days since the invasion began, Ukraine's small-scale farmers and their tractors have become famous worldwide as heroes on the front line. Millions of Ukrainian smallholder farmers and rural laborers are bravely defending our territory, while at the same time continuing to make up the backbone of Ukraine's food security, providing food to millions of vulnerable people in occupied or liberated territories. Ukrainian women face a traumatic choice: leave their homes and villages or stay and either fight or provide humanitarian aid. One of the Russian Army's latest crimes has been the appropriation of hundreds of thousands of tons of grain and farming equipment in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. We urge the international community to monitor this situation very closely and take appropriate measures without delay.

Around the world, in Europe and Central Asia, rural society has been beset by **multiple crises**, each one exacerbating the rest. The climate crisis had already affected the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, as well as biodiversity and soil quality. As a global health issue, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing economic and social inequalities.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine unleashed a humanitarian crisis in various regions around the world and has threatened the food security of people living in low-income countries that depend on

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Ukrainian food imports. Rising food and energy prices continue to create even greater vulnerabilities related to job loss, access to healthy and affordable food, and the enjoyment of human rights.

Military conflicts and continuing crises have demonstrated the importance of strengthening local food systems and reducing dependence on food imports. Small-scale family farmers, agricultural workers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and Indigenous Peoples, who have already shown their resilience in the faces of these crises, play a key role in advancing human rights in food and agriculture, a key element in building sustainable food security.

Wars, social exclusion, and economic hardship force millions of people to cross international borders. In the agricultural sector, that has led to the exploitation of migrants and seasonal workers. Employers then extract additional income by taking advantage of workers' lower legal status and lack of documentation in a race to the bottom when it comes to wages and working conditions.

During the most intense periods of the COVID-19 crisis, **Indigenous Peoples** were able to swiftly adapt to new conditions and continue to feed their communities fresh, healthy and nutritious food, while also finding creative solutions to connect directly with the general population. They continue to protect and support local, sustainable and traditional food systems and work together at all levels for a global transition in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**Women and youth** are a priority and a pillar for social movements involved in agriculture and food production. They must be included in representation and leadership at all levels of our region's political processes.

The Europe and Central Asia region is already suffering from the global **climate crisis**. As civil society, we believe that **agroecology** is the solution to the problems stemming from global climate change.

Dear delegates, we strongly demand that the FAO REU and Member Nations put forth maximum efforts at every level to **STOP THE WAR against Ukraine** and provide immediate humanitarian aid to all those affected. Ukrainian smallholder farmers and agricultural-farmer organizations must be included as a priority in responding to the crisis provoked by this war.

Based on that, human rights, agroecology and the relocalization of food systems must be a priority in implementing the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, with the full participation of civil society and Indigenous Peoples at each stage of the process.

In order to ensure the realization of human rights in food and agriculture for the benefit of society as a whole, we must actively promote and pursue the implementation of all human rights instruments and make use of the framework of the UN Decade of Family Farming, with a special focus on the following documents:

- UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas;
- UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW.

States must ensure that the implementation of the various international agreements to which they are a party does not violate rural and indigenous communities' rights to natural resources (seeds, water, land, biodiversity), and instead promotes, respects, protects and fulfills these fundamental human rights.

We strongly urge governments to renew their commitments and continue to take part in agreements and policies that favour programmes promoting biodiversity, models based on agroecology and reducing the use of manmade fertilizers and synthetic pesticides in Europe and Central Asia. These are the solutions we need to respond to the multiple crises we face as a region and globally, and to achieve sustainable food security.

