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Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Consultation

I'm Maria from Papua New Guinea. Today I represent the 32 participants from civil society, from 16 countries, belonging to 25 organizations and movements at national and regional levels, who came together for the 34th APRC. We are smallholder family farmers and farm workers, landless, rural women and youth, fisherfolks, forest dwellers, pastoralists and herders, indigenous peoples, urban poor, consumers, and NGOs. We thank the FAO once again for your ongoing commitment to engage with CSOs.

First a story. In PNG, we have enough mouths to feed, so we don't focus on exports. Our smallholder farmers, especially women, are mostly reliant on growing traditional crops to sell locally. But it is getting harder for them as corporate farms take up the best available lands to grow export crops, so that now some of our women must walk more than 10km to forage and farm. Traditional crops grown by these farmers proved to be far more resilient than the foreign monocrops, which did not survive severe drought in PNG.

This is just one of the many stories about how farmers, agroecology and traditional knowledge build resilient farming systems across Asia Pacific. FAO itself has repeatedly acknowledged the need to advance agroecology but many member states still push false solutions, like hydroponics in PNG, instead of supporting smallholders to farm agroecologically, connect to local value chains, and sell locally.

Industrial agriculture, especially intensive meat and dairy production, is a major producer of greenhouse gases. Mitigation measures put forward by our governments fail to address these underlying causes and continue to allow the biggest polluters – including agribusinesses, energy and mining companies – to continue taking our land and water, and heating our planet. This includes the mitigation mechanisms of the UNFCCC - including REDD+, Blue Carbon and Climate Smart Agriculture that are also promoted by FAO.

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Mitigation to reduce greenhouse gases and adaptation climate change are rooted in peoples' access to and control of land, freshwater, marine and forest resources and on community led work to advance agroecology, nature restoration and water retentive landscapes.

Around 80% of the world's food is produced by smallholder family farmers and fisherfolks, and yet we are not doing enough to uphold their rights. We see corporate agriculture promoted in much lauded public-private partnerships, and in the support to GMOs, like golden rice – supposedly to feed the world. Just this week, the US Justice Department approved the merger of Bayer and Monsanto – just one more mega-merger that puts our food systems into fewer hands to the detriment of food producers and consumers everywhere. This despite the presence of international recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and smallholder farmers as recognised in the FAO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and in the ongoing discussions for a UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants.

We recommend that FAO:

- implement global policy instruments such as the Declaration of Rights of Peasants once ratified; the UNDRIP, the VGGT, the VGSSF, and RAI with full and active participation of civil society;
- promote regional initiatives such as One Health and ask governments to implement it in their countries to highlight the dangers of AMR and the rise of new strains of avian and porcine flu that threaten global pandemics;
- ensure any food safety 'modernisation' takes into account an ecosystems approach looking at impacts across ecosystems and at the different risk profiles of different scales, ensuring that food safety doesn't negatively impact small-scale producers;
- review the impact of free trade agreements on farmers and food systems, of Blue Growth on fisherfolks and their families, and report on progress of implementation;
- Most of our civil society organizations already require at least 50% participation of women at all our meetings. FAO should advocate gender balance in the member states' delegations during APRC and other key official events, as this enacts meaningful inclusion of women.

We recommend that our governments:

- Work with universities and other educational institutions to bring the FAO's promotion of agroecology to their attention and into their curricula;
- Regulate the promotion of unhealthy food to children;
- Shift public spending (subsidies, procurement) away from industrial farming and implement procurement policies in public institutions that prioritise produce from local, agroecological farms and from sustainable fisheries;
- reject free trade agreements, which contribute to the rapid spread of disease and rise of obesity as countries import more unhealthy calories per capita;
- Support local market infrastructure for bigger countries such as PNG and scattered islands of other nation states, and value chain infrastructure for smallholder exporters in the Pacific.

We recommend that both the FAO and our governments:

- recognize the role of local governments and local communities as frontline responders to the impacts of climate change, by ensuring their participation in decision making and response;
- set up mechanisms and stronger partnerships by working with smallholder family farmers, fisherfolks, pastoralists, forest dwellers, not only for ongoing advice but as real partners from planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives, project, strategy frameworks;
- take the lead in implementing the UN Decade of Family Farming, with strong involvement of civil society, especially family farming organizations at national and regional levels.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, we believe that all of you want the same thing we do – a just world that is free of poverty and hunger, where we are actively slowing climate change and rebuilding resilient ecosystems and safe and healthy food systems for us and future generations. We look forward to continuing to work with you to make that vision a reality.