

United Nations Decade of Family Farming
in Europe and Central Asia Regional Dialogue

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I greet the promoters and all the participants of this Decade of the United Nations Europe and Central Asia Regional Dialogue.

Recognizing the predominant role of family farming, which works the land directly, in food production in developed and developing countries, which provides over 80% of the world's food in quality terms, in addition to its decisive role in the economic, social and cultural dynamism of the territories, as well as its unique contribution to the preservation of biodiversity and natural resources, the fight against human desertification, the UN declared 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming.

Such an initiative was an important lever for awakening awareness throughout the world of the dangers facing humanity and the planet, namely hunger and malnutrition which, in many regions primarily affects the farmers who feed us.

A new impetus was needed and therefore the UN General Assembly proclaimed the Decade of Family Farming which, with the World Action Plan as a guiding instrument, a reference for the development of policies and public investments favourable to Family Farming, in each region and in each country, in order to strengthen its contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas, whose adoption in each country will be a fundamental pillar for achieving the goals of the Decade, so that Family Farming can develop, ensure the food sovereignty of each people and fulfil its mission to contribute decisively to the eradication of hunger which, despite all efforts, has increased worldwide in recent years before the onset of the covid-19 pandemic and which, with this and the war in Ukraine, is worsening.

From here I express the solidarity of the peasants, of Family Farming of the whole world, with the peasants, the Family Farming and the people of Ukraine, direct victims who suffer the effects of a war when what they most need is peace to be able to produce and feed the people.

Indirectly, peasants all over the world are also affected and many cannot resist the shockwaves provoked, the unbridled speculation, the brutal increase in the prices of everything they need to produce, while they experience enormous difficulties to sell their productions at prices that allow them to live with dignity from their work.

Three years after the start of the Decade, we value the steps taken in some countries in the region, with progress in the creation of National Commissions on Family Farming, work towards the elaboration of 7 National Action Plans, the publication of diverse legislation directed towards Family Farming in 13 countries, some of it in response to new problems arising from the pandemic.

But we must all recognise that much remains to be done!

This is a vast region of fifty countries, 27 of which are part of the European Union and, in the current context, it is necessary to implement the measures already decided, analyse new problems and set objectives accordingly.

La Via Campesina and its European Coordinator, whom I represent here, are making every effort to ensure that the Decade achieves its objectives.

We are committed to working together with FAO structures and Governments, as well as with schools and academia, and to mobilizing other actors in the so-called civil society, so that the Decade may be an instrument for the promotion of Family Farming, for the qualitative transformation of human food and for contributing to the achievement of the SDGs.

The currently dominant production system, which is industrial, intensive and delocalized, depletes resources, reduces biodiversity, generates surpluses, but has not contributed to the reduction and eradication of hunger.

Paradoxically, or perhaps not, technological and scientific development has not been placed at the service of humanity, but rather has served to accumulate wealth in an increasingly restricted nucleus, to cause the disappearance of millions of family farms, to relocate production, to create new dependencies and constraints on food sovereignty, to cause gigantic waves of emigration of farmers who have been left without their land and the emergence of labour under slave-like conditions.

The new era of digitalisation, which is talked about so much these days as a miraculous solution, cannot be turned against family farming, many of which are ageing and decapitalised and unable to benefit from it.

Family farming is the bearer of millennial knowledge of good land use, respect for natural resources and biodiversity, because those who need the land to live cherish it.

Family farming cannot be a simple recipient of policy or technical guidelines, it is both the recipient of the Decade and the engine for achieving the SDGs.

Allow me to address the experience of my country, Portugal and of my association, the National Confederation of Agriculture. As an association with forty-four years of activity, we have always focused our activity on defending the interests and rights of small and medium farmers, and for more than twenty years we have adopted the designation of Family Farming, because it is fundamentally in the family that their work resides.

In 2014, the International Year of Family Farming, our 8th Congress approved a proposal for a Family Farming Statute, which characterised it, set out its rights and defined the public policies needed to strengthen it.

Such proposal came to be welcomed by the Prime Minister and was the basis of the decree-law that in 2018 enshrined the Family Farming Statute. So far we have maintained dialogue with the Government, in order to smooth some edges and improve its effectiveness.

We are currently finalising the National Action Plan for Family Farming, built in a participatory process involving the Directorate General of Agriculture of the Ministry of Agriculture, the School of Agriculture of Viseu and Actuar, associations promoting sustainable food systems. Now in public consultation to receive contributions from the whole of society, this was done through various debates and a deep and wide consultation of family farmers and their associations, youth and women's associations and other entities. The final version will soon be submitted to the Government, hoping that it will be adopted and become an instrument to fulfil the objectives of the Decade.

Also on the initiative of my Confederation, last December the Competence Centre for Family Farming and Agroecology was created and recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, which also includes university institutions, Ministry of Agriculture bodies, Young Farmers' and Rural Women's Associations, Regional and Rural Development Associations, and which on the 28th, with the participation of the Minister of Agriculture, will publicly present its Work Plan.

In conclusion, I consider that

The seven Pillars of the World Action Plan are sufficiently comprehensive for Family Farming to be promoted in each region and country. No two countries are alike and

each one, in accordance with concrete situations, should, in a participative manner, prioritise the design of the necessary political, financial or technical measures, based on listening to Family Farming and its representative associations, hearing them about the problems they perceive and their proposals for improving the working and living conditions of Family Farming, because with this we are protecting making the planet more sustainable and improving the lives of us all.

Thank you

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