

H.E. Mr. António Guterres

United Nations Secretary-General

Your Excellency,

In December 2019, it was officially announced that your office will be hosting a Food Systems Summit in 2021 with the aim of maximizing the benefits of a food systems approach across the entire 2030 Agenda, meeting the challenges of climate change, making food systems inclusive, and supporting sustainable peace. A concept note for the Summit circulated at the High-Level Political Forum in New York in 2019 indicated that the World Economic Forum (WEF) will be involved in organizing the Summit. As small-scale food producers' organizations and other civil society organizations concerned with food, we recognize the importance and timeliness of this Summit, but we have some grave concerns that we would like to bring to your attention.

We believe that the Summit is not building on the legacy of the past world food summits, which were clearly anchored in the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and resulted in the creation of innovative, inclusive and participatory governance mechanisms with the goal of realizing the right to adequate food for all.

The UN-WEF strategic partnership agreement signed in June 2019 casts a cloud on the integrity of the United Nations (UN) as a multilateral system. Further, the appointment of Ms. Agnes Kalibata, the current President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) as your Special Envoy for the Summit presents a clear conflict of interest with regards to the stated purpose of the Summit.

In September 2019, more than 400 civil society organizations sent you a letter calling for the termination of the UN-WEF strategic partnership agreement. We believe that this agreement is fundamentally at odds with the UN Charter and with intergovernmental decisions on sustainable development, the climate emergency, and the eradication of poverty and hunger. It will provide transnational corporations (TNCs) preferential access to the UN system and permanently associate the UN with TNCs, some of whose core activities have caused and/or worsened the social, economic and environmental crises the world faces.

The appointment of the President of AGRA as your Special Envoy contradicts the innovative spirit of the Summit, since AGRA is an alliance that promotes the interests of agribusiness. The role of agribusiness in shaping food systems has been challenged by large sectors of the population across the world and in a steadily increasing body of research: TNCs and investors profiting from industrial agriculture, fishing and livestock-keeping are responsible for destroying ecosystems, grabbing lands, water and natural resources, undermining the livelihoods of rural communities, perpetuating exploitative working conditions, creating health problems, and for a significant proportion of green house gas (GHG) emissions. Further, agribusinesses focus primarily on productivity and yields, whereas the notion of food systems makes visible the multi-dimensionality of food, much of which is related to public purpose objectives that cannot be met through corporate interests.

Family Farmers produce more than 80% of the world's food in value terms. They should be at the center of the UN Food Systems Summit, particularly during this UN Decade on Family Farming.

Instead of drawing from the innovative governance experiences that the UN system has to offer, the UN-WEF partnership is helping to establishing “stakeholder capitalism” as a governance model for the entire planet. The WEF's multi-stakeholder platforms lack democratic legitimacy and focus instead on harnessing the opportunities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution for the benefit of TNCs and global financial capital. In contrast, the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the FAO, with the mandate of ending hunger and malnutrition, offer a different model. The CFS is widely recognized as the most inclusive and participatory UN Committee where the constituencies most affected by hunger and malnutrition--indigenous peoples, landless people, women, rural workers, peasants, fisherfolks, pastoralists, consumers, urban food insecure people and youth--can meaningfully and actively participate in shaping intergovernmental decisions about the best policies to ensure the realization of the human right to adequate food for all. The CFS is currently negotiating guidelines on food systems and nutrition as well as policy recommendations on agroecology, both of which genuinely address the concerns that the proposed UN summit wishes to pursue. The FAO has adopted clear policies for engagement with civil society, indigenous peoples, and small-scale food producers, as well as substantive policy frameworks and processes for transforming food systems, such as the Ten Elements of Agroecology adopted by the FAO Council in December 2019. The FAO plays a key role in the UN Decade of Family Farming and is also supporting the development and implementation of the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture and multiple other food and agriculture-related elements of international negotiations.

In closing, we reiterate our call to undo the UN-WEF partnership agreement and rethink the organization of the Food System Summit. We request you to build instead on successful innovations in democratic and multilateral food governance. We further call on you to engage with the governments of countries and constituencies most affected by hunger and the climate crisis, to envisage a truly democratic, transparent and transformative format for a UN Summit that can take us closer to meeting SDG 2.1 “By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutrition and sufficient food all year round“ and all of the related goals that the international community has set itself.

We would highly appreciate your response to the concerns expressed in this letter.

Respectfully,