

Ambassadors, distinguished delegates,

Thank you very much for giving me the floor.

As the representative of Civil Society, I am speaking on behalf of Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia Food Sovereignty Network that brings together all the CSO constituencies: small-scale farmers, pastoralists, small scale and artisanal fisher people, Indigenous Peoples, migrant and agricultural workers, consumers, NGOs as well as rural women and youth in our Region.

### **Let me start with the women's perspective**

I am hereby speaking in the name of the women farmers, pastoralists, fisher people, Indigenous Peoples, consumers and NGOs who are the driving force of the Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia Food Sovereignty Network (Nyéléni ECA)<sup>1</sup>. They have built the food systems that fed our Region in the past, continue to feed us today and will also continue to feed us all tomorrow. We are the heart of the food and farming systems, we are the ones who are vital to our collective survival.

Women have been confronting patriarchy and destructive political, social and economic systems through their collective struggle for food sovereignty and feminism and building resilient agricultural systems based on agroecological farming practices that not only improve food production but also work in harmony with nature. We are the backbone of any sustainable food system, through seed saving and preservation of agro-biodiversity, as well as our respect for pollinators thanks to our communities. Our practice provides the solutions; we invest in agroecology, and in the circular, solidarity and feminist economy. We affirm that this is essential to rebuild and shape our future and reclaim our rights. We are the ones who generate local knowledge, build and shape social justice, promote our respective and varied identities and cultures, and strengthen the vision of a new society founded on gender relations based on dignity, justice, equality and equity.

Despite the fact that we are vital, and that we have been sharing and transmitting our knowledge for centuries, we still face discrimination, violence and exploitation for profit; there are still unequal opportunities to education. Our economic, social, legal and political rights are not fully recognized, and public policies fail to guarantee our equal social and economic participation. Our rights of access to land, support services, financial and economic resources and legal recognition are minimal. In spite of this, we represent the majority of food producers and continue to do unpaid essential food-related care work such as processing, preparing, storing and seed saving. We, as young women are losing our lands, our territories and our natural resources as well as our work. This is a result of displacement and forced migrations, especially with the current deepening global multiple crises. Today, the first of these global crises is the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic is aggravating pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems. We are experiencing

<sup>1</sup> *\*Nyeleni ECA is a wide Pan-European movement uniting farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples, consumers, agricultural workers, as well as rural women and youth and environmental organizations. We advocate for the rights of peoples to define our own food and agricultural systems and have access to healthy and culturally appropriate food, by prioritizing local and national economies and markets, and empowering peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture and small-scale fisheries with an agroecological approach. The movement shares the vision of the FAO that "smallholder and family farms are an integral part for ensuring long-term food security and solutions for rural poverty reduction and social and environmental sustainability in Europe and Central Asia". As Civil Society Organisations (small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fishers, Indigenous Peoples, agricultural and food workers, consumers, women, youth and NGOs) from across different regions, we are rights holders and active members of the food system. Through our collective efforts, we work to guarantee the right to adequate food and nutrition – especially in difficult times like these.*

impacts more severely because we already earn less, we suffer from job insecurity, and often live close to, or below the poverty line. We are the ones who do unpaid care work which has increased during the pandemic lock-downs. We are the ones who are facing gender-based violence which has also increased during the pandemic, and finally we are the ones who have not been included or recognised in most of the COVID-19 response planning and decision-making.

## **B) COVID 19 and our answers to the multiple crises**

The Covid-19 pandemic has in fact, deepened existing economic inequalities and social injustice. It has and continues to push many rural and urban people in our region into severe financial insecurity.

Daily waged workers both migrant workers in the field and in food chain processing units often have no social protection when they fall ill in both Western Europe and other countries in our region. ILO has clearly pointed out that there are increased violations of workers' rights, with a particular focus on migrant and agri-food chain workers. This is echoed by the erosion of the Human Right to Food and many other rights (housing, health...) in many of the States in our region. The restrictions imposed to respond to the pandemic have and continue to affect the livelihoods of many small-scale food producers, both farmers, fishers and pastoralists.

In addition to these health issues, there has been increased political violence and political instability and criminalisation of people's resistance in some parts of our region, including war. We condemn war and call all States of our Region to contribute to peace-building based on social justice. War is destructive for all life: humans, animals, plants and for the planet. War, instability and oppression are particularly brutal for agriculture. This obviously affects food production and supply chains, and presents special risks to small-scale food producers in these zones as well as to urban poor. Food security is linked to peace, and food sovereignty to peoples' right to determine their own food systems and their right to adequate and culturally appropriate food and nutrition. This must be prioritised in our region.

There has also been a documented evidence-based increase in domestic violence affecting mainly women and also children during the pandemic, in both urban and rural areas during strict periods of lockdown. Lack of support for elderly and disabled people has also been identified across the region!

There is a need for the democratization of our societies and full participation of youth in political and decision-making processes. We must ensure that everywhere in society, youth should be able to develop leadership skills. In our region we need integral policies for the integration of youth in rural areas by the democratization of land, and the creation of direct employment, access to local and territorial markets, housing and food production which offers full rights over lands, which recognises the legal rights of Indigenous Peoples, peasants, and other people working in rural areas, which includes the right to life and adequate standards, the right to land and territory, seeds, productive resources, markets, information, justice and equality between women and men.

We need the Decade of Family Farming and the Decade of Nutrition to be considered as unique opportunities for policy coherence and governmental commitment based on human rights obligations and for these two initiatives to be more than a mere formality. These two Decades must be considered as a real opportunity for ensuring policies and public investments that benefit and support small-scale food producers and family-owned small-scale farms, in rural and urban communities across the Region.

Food banks are witnessing an up to 40% increase in demand. School closures last spring meant that many children have been deprived of their school meals, often the only source of a healthy meal in their day. There have been and continue to be massive job losses due to the resulting economic crisis

that are leading to homelessness and inability to buy healthy food. This lack of healthy food in turn leads to weaker immune systems and greater risks of developing underlying health conditions which in

turn means that people are less able to resist if and when they catch Covid-19. The major underlying health conditions that make people vulnerable to the Covid-19 pandemic are industrial food related Non-Communicable (NSDs) diseases such as heart conditions, diabetes as well as malnutrition, obesity, and under-nutrition – lack of minerals and vitamins (C and D).

The prioritisation of trade and international markets to the detriment of local markets and small food producers, have and continue to be aggravating factors.

Several studies by FAO and the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism have clearly shown that short food chains and territorial food systems have proven to be the most resilient. At local level, direct supply chains between producers and consumers (such as Community Supported Agriculture, consumers cooperatives, urban-rural connected direct sales mechanisms, etc) were authorised to continue during the pandemic all over the world. In many cases existing partnerships were extended to include larger groups of local producers to help consumers and especially the urban poor to access fresh healthy food (there was a several hundred percentile increase in demand during the earlier stages of the pandemic with the first series of lockdowns) and ensure that producers could continue to sell their produce and access markets. And although demand has fallen back, contractualised sales of vegetable boxes from producers to consumers has increased by an overall 20%. This can be considered as part of the social dimension of the 10 Elements of Agroecology that includes solidarity economy, with different price mechanisms and support from Local Government to enable access to healthy affordable food for all, even in times of Covid-19. This needs to be based on farmer-led prices to ensure they have decent livelihoods. We clearly believe that we need to promote all aspects of agroecology as part of the Covid-19 response by the UN institutions and States as well as Local Governments and integrate our Covid-19 response into the food systems and nutrition discussion in a way we have not yet done.

This is why it is so important to give greater support to local food systems innovations and facilitate the networking of those experiences at regional level, in order to overcome the multiple environmental, social and economic crises that we are facing.

For the purpose of surmounting these challenges we need a drastic paradigm shift from a trade- to a rights-based approach for food and agricultural policies – as the trade approach has been proven to fail many times at different levels in the region. This is why the dissemination and implementation of both UNDROP and UNDRIP at Regional, national and local level is crucial.

Moreover, with the imminent approach and ambivalent welcoming of the digitalization process, we also need to draw more attention to the question of ownership of the food producers' and Indigenous Peoples' data, as it is currently being grabbed from them without their prior or informed consent – this needs to stop! We need to immediately halt all on-going data-grabbing from smallholder food producers, and implement a strict regulatory framework that will allow them to benefit from the digitalisation processes to which they choose to adhere. Moreover, these processes should be community owned.

### **C) Nyéléni ECA: the next steps**

In light of these elements, the next steps we propose for CSOs in the region are the following: First of all, we will establish and widely share a regional hub of convergence on innovative experiences of local food systems based on food sovereignty and agroecology in our networks paying special attention to and emphasizing gender and youth.. We believe it is extremely important to share knowledge and experiences to inspire and empower food producers, as well as connecting them at regional level.

Secondly, we will continue to raise awareness of the UNDROP, the UNDRIP, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure (VGTT) and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines) in the region and also around the world and within institutions, while strengthening the link between human rights and food and agricultural issues, and influencing public

policies in support of small-scale sustainable producers. We are committed to working towards transparent and inclusive legislative and further implementation processes, with a strong focus on the rights holders – small family farmers, peasants, fisher people, pastoralists, other people working in rural areas, and as well as the Indigenous Peoples overall right to adequate and culturally appropriate food and nutrition.

Thirdly, we plan to launch an Observatory on the criminalisation of food producers' leaders and their organizations – as all too often the crimes and repression against them are not recognised or sufficiently followed up, leaving them without justice being served on those who have persecuted them.

Fourthly, we will promote the convergence of different actors (including organizations and individuals outside the food sovereignty movement) to protect small-scale food producers' and Indigenous knowledge from data grabbing, and enhance food producers' and Indigenous Peoples digital sovereignty.

#### **D) FAO REGIONAL PRIORITIES**

We commit to contributing to the FAO regional priorities with our knowledge, practice, action and struggles. We acknowledge the work done together in the past biennium and request further and deeper involvement of CSOs in contributing to FAO REU to achieve the results foreseen.

#### **E) HAND IN HAND INITIATIVE**

We view the Hand in Hand initiative with interest, should we become fully involved, although this is not yet the case. We consider the idea of partnerships with all levels of government, and in particular Local Government to be positive. We believe that community and social enterprises, cooperatives and other forms of circular, solidarity and feminist economy can be created in this way through partnerships to support the implementation of sustainable food systems and nutrition, especially at territorial and local levels. On the other hand we express our concern about the predominant role attributed to the private sector and the lack of coherence with what was foreseen in the UNDFP and in particular with the Global and the national plans linked to this initiative.

#### **F) UNFSS**

Finally, we are extremely concerned about the UN Food Systems Summit. Hunger and malnutrition continue to increase all over the world. We are confronted on a daily basis by the way in which extreme poverty especially affects small-scale food producers in rural areas. Furthermore, we have also had direct experience of how the current COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the horrific structural inequalities, discrimination, exploitation, racism, sexism and patriarchy in our societies, including in Europe and Central Asia.

There is nothing new in the fact that social movements and organised civil society, such as the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), of which Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia is a member, have constantly denounced the structural inequalities and the industrial food system which are key factors that have led to the current crises. Our agenda for change did not begin with the creation of the 2030 Agenda. But what we observe and what we are confronted by is often the lack of political will and the increased influence of corporate power that are shaping our food systems.

At a first glance, the aims of the UNFSS seem to make sense in the current reality. However, the genesis of the Summit and its ongoing process show how much corporate power is shaping the path towards the Summit and therefore highlighting serious conflicts of interests. We are extremely concerned by the extent to which corporate power is shaping the path towards the summit. We have to highlight the fact that the UNFSS is the result of the partnership agreement signed in 2019 between the World Economic Forum and the United Nations, This opened the door and gave corporations preferential and deferential access to the UN system. at the highest level in all fields, from food to health and beyond. The process towards this Summit represents a big threat to the UN multilateral system, while pushing

for the promotion of multi-stakeholder governance in which corporate power will increase its influence within the UN System, risking the integrity of the UN including that of the FAO and threatening the protection and promotion of human rights.

The Committee on World Food Security (and consequently the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism) as the foremost international and intergovernmental policy platform on food issues has been undermined from the beginning of the Summit process. At the same time, social movements and organised civil society have been deliberately excluded from the Summit process, while organisers are handpicking individuals to be called “champions”, “heroes” and so on. There are no clarity or transparent criteria for their selection, nor respect for or recognition of the principles of autonomy and self-organization of social movements and civil society.

The proposed Summit is not building on the legacy of the two previous World Food Summits. Instead, it risks undermining the 25 years of work in democratizing international decision-making in food and agriculture and a model of engagement that fosters and values the critical participation of those who are most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, while being the primary contributors to food security.

We believe in solidarity and equality. We believe that to achieve the SDGs the only path is a rights based approach. We show you this path every day and we call for a radical shift in food and agriculture policies to ones based on food sovereignty and agroecology. This is why we need to implement the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure (VGTT) as well as the International Guidelines Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines), the UNDROP and UNDRIP at national and local level, based on the States’ human rights obligations. They should now be promoted and implemented.

Thank you very much!

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on behalf of the CSO Consultation  
prior to the FAO 32<sup>nd</sup> ERC*