

**European Union**

**Fifth Session of the open-ended intergovernmental working group on United Nations declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas**

**(9-13 April 2018)**

**EU general statement**

Mr. Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

Dear colleagues,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the EU for the duration of the fifth session of this Working Group. We congratulate you for your election as Chair-Rapporteur of this Working Group. Please be assured of the EU’s support for you in your work.

Mr. Chair,

The EU attaches great importance to the situation and the human rights of persons living and working in rural areas. The EU remains deeply concerned by the fact that there are still significant inequalities with regard to the full realization of all human rights, in particular economic, social and cultural rights, between persons living in rural and persons living in urban areas. The EU remains committed to further discussing and exploring the various possibilities to ensure a better promotion and protection of all human rights of people living in rural areas. At the same time the EU notes that divergent views on the content of the UN Declaration persist and would like to underline that it is the obligation of every State to ensure the promotion and protection of all human rights without discrimination.

As we have stated on previous occasions, the EU attaches great importance to the situation and the human rights of persons living and working in rural areas. Let me take the opportunity to stress that the EU welcomes the adoption of agreed conclusions on the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls - just a few days ago, at the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

To this end, the EU contributes significantly to national efforts through development assistance, seeking to improve the situation of persons living in rural areas. The EU recognizes that challenges faced by persons living and working in rural areas around the world need to be addressed, and we consider this Working Group an important opportunity to discuss how to improve the promotion and effective implementation of the rights of those living and working in rural areas.

Mr. Chair,

We would like to thank you for circulating the revised draft Declaration from 12 February 2018 well advance of this session and for the consultations held on 20 February 2018.

The EU has constructively engaged in the four sessions of the Working Group. We thank you for taking on board some of our proposals. We recognize that there are improvements to the text, however we note that problems in the text remain, especially with regard to notions of extra-territoriality, rights to seeds, land, means of production, food sovereignty and biological diversity.

We remain concerned that this draft attempts to create new rights, while we are negotiating a Declaration, which by definition, will not constitute a legally binding document and, thus, cannot create new rights. Attention must be paid to adopt a consistent approach regarding to the existing human rights framework.

Our concerns have already been highlighted in EU’s previous comments. While such concerns remain, we are ready to continue our constructive engagement in the session before us.

Mr. Chair,

For the reasons outlined above, the EU as a whole is not in the position to support the Declaration in this present version. We are, in the spirit of constructive engagement, ready to participate in the discussions this week and raise some general and some specific comments on the draft text, without prejudice to our overall position.

In closing, let me reiterate the EU’s support in your work and express the EU’s hope that this Working Group will be able to make progress this week towards the goal of an improvement in the human rights situation of persons living and working in rural areas in a pragmatic and realistic way.

Thank you.