

International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations



General statement – Opening, 5th session of the OEIWG

Sue Longley speaking on behalf of the IUF, the global trade union federation for food and agricultural workers.

Our congratulations to the Ambassador on his election as chair rapporteur of this OEIWG and our thanks to Ambassador of Bolivia for the work she and her team did on the Declaration.

The IUF is a global trade union composed of 421 affiliated trade unions in 130 countries – representing many millions of rural workers. The workers we represent do not own or rent the land they work on. They are employed...often in very precarious and non-standard forms of employment. These workers make up over 40% of the agricultural workforce and alongside small scale farmers contribute significantly to global food security while they and their families, like the families of small farmers, are often hungry and food insecure.

They work in an industry which alongside mining and construction is one of the 3 most dangerous industries and the sector with the highest rate of fatal accidents.

In some countries rural workers continue to be excluded from the protection of labour legislation or have lower levels of protection.

For the IUF, this Declaration will be a tool to help us make a clear demand on States to end this discrimination against rural workers and extend to them the same protection from labour laws and other relevant legal protection as other workers. In this context the Declaration is NOT about new rights for agricultural workers but about ending the discrimination they face and ensuring they can access their rights as other workers do.

Finally chair, we are concerned that the Declaration does not recognize and address in sufficient detail the issue of child labour in rural areas. The latest statistics from the ILO (and used by the FAO) show that 70% of all child labourers work in agriculture alone – that is nearly 100 million boys & girls.

Child labour perpetuates poverty, it does not help eliminate it. We would like to see stronger commitments in the Declaration to the elimination of child labour in rural areas, especially agriculture.

We look forward to a constructive week of discussions and negotiations to move us forward towards the adoption of the Declaration.