

Oral statement of FIAN International during the fourth session of the inter-governmental working group for a UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

Comments on Article

May 2017

Thank you Madam Chairperson,

We would like to express our full support to Article 19 on the right to seeds, especially to peasant's right to save, use, exchange and sell their seed or propagating material, as defined under paragraph 1d).

We recall States that this provision, as well as the language used, is already recognized by widely accepted international agreements, such as the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Ensuring peasant's reliance on their traditional seed systems is fundamental for the realization of their human right to adequate food and nutrition, especially considering that the overwhelming majority of peasants depend on traditional seeds as an essential means of achieving their livelihood. According to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' General Comment No. 12 on the Right to adequate food, States have the obligation to respect existing access to adequate food. In his report on Seed policies and the right to food, The Special Rapporteur on the Right to food clearly states that the introduction of measures which create obstacles to the reliance of farmers on informal seed systems would violate this obligation, since it would deprive them from a means of achieving their livelihood.

Peasants have been conserving, using, saving, storing and exchanging their seeds since the first cultivation of crops some 11,000 years ago, which proves the customary nature of this right which ought now to be protected under an international human rights instrument.

Besides of representing a vital resource for peasant's livelihood, peasant seeds are inextricably linked to specific ecosystems and therefore particular human communities, cultures, and to the identity of peasants and other people working in rural areas. It is for this reason that the collective aspect of this right is vital, as seeds do not exist without the community responsible for their selection and conservation.

Finally, in a context of severe threat to agricultural biodiversity, where it is estimated that 75% of plant genetic diversity has been lost, it is of utmost importance for States to support peasant seed systems which guarantee agrobiodiversity. This is vital in order to ensure humanity's food security. Thank you.