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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Report of the Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas*

Chair-Rapporteur: Geneviève Savigny

Summary

The Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas was established on 11 October 2023 by the Human Rights Council by its resolution 54/9.

In the present report, its first to the Human Rights Council, the Working Group provides a brief analysis of the situation of peasants and other people working in rural areas (sect. II) and a historical overview relating to the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas and the establishment of the Working Group (Sect. III). Section IV contains an outline of an initial conceptual framework that the Working Group has elaborated to guide its interpretation of the Declaration and facilitate its implementation at the national, regional and international levels. Section V contains an overview of the methods of work agreed upon by the Working Group at its first session.

* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline due to the late establishment of the Working Group.



I. Introduction

1. The Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas was established by the Human Rights Council by its resolution 54/9, in which the Council recognized that peasants and other people working in rural areas were especially vulnerable to food insecurity, malnutrition, discrimination and exploitation and disproportionately affected by poverty, violence and climate change. To address such challenges, the Council decided to establish the Working Group, with the following mandate:

(a) To promote the effective and comprehensive dissemination and implementation of the Declaration while identifying challenges and gaps in its implementation at the national, regional and international levels;

(b) To identify, exchange and promote good practices and lessons learned on the implementation of the Declaration;

(c) To facilitate and contribute to the exchange of technical assistance, capacity-building, transfer of technologies and international cooperation in support of national efforts, actions and measures to better implement the Declaration.

2. Under its mandate, the Working Group is also requested to work in close coordination with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and other human rights mechanisms, the human rights treaty bodies, relevant United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes, international organizations and regional mechanisms, to seek and receive information from all relevant sources, including Governments, the rights holders as defined in article 1 of the Declaration, national human rights institutions and civil society and to submit an annual report to the Council and to the General Assembly on its work and activities, containing its conclusions and recommendations.

3. Five independent experts from different geographical regions were appointed as members of the Working Group for a period of three years by the Human Rights Council at its fifty-fifth session, held in March 2024. They assumed their functions on 1 May 2024. The experts are: Carlos Duarte (Colombia); Uche Ewelukwa Ofodile (Nigeria); Shalmali Guttal (India); Davit Hakobyan (Armenia); and Geneviève Savigny (France).

4. The Working Group held its first session from 15 to 19 July 2024 online. At its first meeting, the Working Group elected Ms. Savigny as Chair-Rapporteur, Mr. Duarte as Vice-Chair and Ms. Ewelukwa Ofodile as Vice-Chair and focal point for communications. During the session, the Working Group also agreed on its methods of work, elaborated in response to the specific features of its mandate. The Working Group will continue to refine its methods of work as it carries out its mandate.

II. Situation of peasants and other people working in rural areas

5. In 2022, between 691 and 783 million people in the world faced hunger, 122 million more than in 2019, before the onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.¹ The situation did not improve significantly in 2023, where between 713 and 757 million people are estimated to have been undernourished and, overall, an estimated 28.9 per cent of the global population (2.33 billion people) were moderately or severely food insecure.²

6. Eighty per cent of people suffering from hunger live in rural areas, particularly in developing countries, and 50 per cent are small-scale and traditional farm holders,

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023: Urbanization, Agrifood Systems Transformation and Healthy Diets across the Rural–Urban Continuum* (Rome, FAO, 2023), p. xvi.

² FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024: Financing to End Hunger, Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in All Its Forms* (Rome, FAO, 2024), p. xvi.

subsistence peasants and other people working in rural areas. In 2022, 2.4 billion people, comprising relatively more women and people living in rural areas, did not have access to nutritious, safe and sufficient food all year round. In 2022, moderate or severe food insecurity affected 33.3 per cent of adults living in rural areas compared with 28.8 per cent in towns and peri-urban areas and 26 per cent in urban areas.³ In 2023, food insecurity remained consistently higher in rural areas globally and in all regions except Europe and North America.⁴

7. Food insecurity shows variation across regions and subregions, reflecting changes in demographics, employment, income levels and agrifood systems. In 2023, hunger continued to increase in Africa and remained relatively unchanged in Asia, while in Latin America, there was notable progress. Africa remains the region with the highest proportion of the population suffering from hunger: 20.4 per cent compared with 6.2 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 8.1 per cent in Asia and 7.3 per cent in Oceania. More than half of the world's hungry people are still to be found in Asia, however.⁵

8. The complete analysis made in 2023 using the 2022 data showed that regional variations were nuanced by income variations among countries, reflecting the complexities that shape sustained access to food: in low-income countries, both moderate and severe food insecurity were highest in rural and peri-urban areas; in lower-middle-income countries, they were highest in rural areas; in upper-middle-income countries, they were highest in rural areas and lowest in peri-urban areas; and in high-income countries, they were highest in urban areas.⁶

9. Food insecurity affects women more than men globally and in every region of the world, especially in rural areas and among particular income brackets in rural areas. In 2022, 27.8 per cent of adult women were moderately or severely food insecure compared with 25.4 per cent of men and the proportion of women facing severe food insecurity was 10.6 per cent compared with 9.5 per cent of men.⁷ Despite a narrowing of the gender gap in most regions in 2022 and 2023, the prevalence of food insecurity remained higher among women than among men globally and in all regions.⁸

10. The gender gap in food insecurity at the global level, which had widened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, narrowed from 3.8 percentage points in 2021 to 2.4 percentage points in 2022. Specifically, however, the gender gap diminished in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean but widened in Africa, North America and Europe.⁹

11. The gender gap in food insecurity persists in many regions because of gender inequality that threatens women's right to food and affects their access to the means to produce and purchase food. Rural women grow much of the world's food and play pivotal roles in ensuring the food and nutritional security of their families yet tend to be more food insecure than men. Women also bear the main responsibilities for family and community care work and are more affected than men by income and job losses, displacement, decreased access to water and natural resources, extreme weather events and climate change. Unequal gender norms, however, restrict women's access to land, productive resources and knowledge, resulting in poverty and food and nutrition insecurity.¹⁰

³ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*, pp. vii and xvi.

⁴ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024*, p. 4.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 4 and 10.

⁶ *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*, pp. 24 and 25.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024*, p. 19 and fig. 7.

⁹ *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*, p. 25.

¹⁰ See Katherine Meighan, "Food systems and gender: the groundbreaking role of rural women", *Journal of International Affairs* (Spring/Summer 2024). See also <https://www.fao.org/gender/learning-center/thematic-areas/gender-and-food-security-and-nutrition/1/en>.

III. Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas

12. Like all human beings, peasants and other people working in rural areas are entitled to the equal and effective enjoyment of all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Women living in rural areas and Indigenous Peoples also benefit from the protection granted by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

13. Those human rights instruments have not proven sufficient, however, to guarantee the protection of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas and address the various forms of discrimination, exploitation and social exclusion to which they have been subjected in many countries. To overcome that situation and to advance their rights, at the turn of the millennium, peasants from all over the world and their representative organizations joined efforts to claim better protection of their rights and fundamental freedoms under international human rights law.

14. The global food crisis in the period 2007–2008 deepened already existing discrimination and social exclusion against peasants and people working in rural areas. For the first time in history, more than 1 billion people were undernourished worldwide¹¹ and peasants, people working in rural areas, women and Indigenous Peoples were among the most affected groups. That situation gave new impetus to the struggle of peasants and their representative organizations for the recognition and respect of their rights and freedoms.

15. In 2009, La Via Campesina, an international movement bringing together peasants, landless workers, Indigenous People, rural women and other people working in rural areas from around the world, adopted the Declaration of Rights of Peasants – Women and Men.¹² The Declaration of Rights of Peasants – Women and Men, whose structure is similar to that of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, was the first human rights instrument completely devoted to the rights of peasants. It contains a call for the elaboration and adoption of an international convention on the rights of peasants.

16. In 2010, the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee published a preliminary study on discrimination in the context of the right to food. The study found that hunger, like poverty, was still predominantly a rural problem. It showed that 80 per cent of people suffering from hunger lived in rural areas, particularly in developing countries: 50 per cent were small-scale and traditional farmers who depended mainly or partly on agriculture for their livelihoods but lacked sufficient access to productive resources, such as land, water and seeds, 20 per cent were landless families who survived as tenant farmers or poorly paid agricultural labourers and the remaining 10 per cent were people living in rural communities from traditional fishing, hunting and herding activities.¹³

17. Acknowledging the importance of the matter, the Human Rights Council requested the Advisory Committee to undertake a separate preliminary study on ways and means to further advance the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, including women.¹⁴ The study was focused on the rights of the most vulnerable people working in rural areas, in particular smallholder farmers, landless workers, fishers, hunters and gatherers and peasant women, who constitute 70 per cent of the world's hungry.

18. The conclusion reached in the study was that the main causes of discrimination and vulnerability of peasants and other people working in rural areas were closely linked to several human rights violations: (a) expropriation of land, forced evictions and displacement; (b) gender discrimination; (c) the absence of agrarian reform and rural development policies;

¹¹ See <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/1-02-billion-people-hungry/en>.

¹² See <https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2011/03/Declaration-of-rights-of-peasants-2009.pdf>.

¹³ United Nations Millennium Project Task Force on Hunger, "Halving hunger, it can be done", United Nations Development Programme, 2005.

¹⁴ [A/HRC/16/63](#).

(d) the lack of minimum wages and social protection; and (e) the criminalization of movements defending the rights of people working in rural areas.¹⁵

19. To strengthen the protection and promotion of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, the Advisory Council recommended a three-pronged approach aimed at: (a) better implementing existing international norms; (b) addressing the normative gaps under international human rights law; and (c) elaborating a new legal instrument on the rights of people working in rural areas.

20. In 2012, the Advisory Committee submitted its final study on the advancement of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.¹⁶ The final study confirmed the analysis contained in the preliminary study, namely, that existing international human rights instruments could not ensure the equal and effective protection of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, even if they were better implemented. The Advisory Committee concluded that it was necessary to go beyond existing norms and address the normative gaps under international human rights law.¹⁷

21. To overcome that situation, the Advisory Committee recommended, *inter alia*, that the Human Rights Council create a new special procedure to improve the promotion and protection of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas and develop a new international human rights instrument – initially, a declaration – to better promote and protect those rights.¹⁸ A declaration on the rights of peasants was annexed to the study to serve as a model for the new instrument to be developed by the Council.

22. The declaration included a number of the rights enshrined in existing international instruments in order to increase their visibility and show their relevance for peasants and other people working in rural areas. It also included new rights specifically related to the particular situation and needs of peasants and other people working in rural areas, such as the rights to land, seeds and the means of production. The Advisory Committee noted that the elaboration of the new instrument by the Human Rights Council, with the full participation of concerned individuals and groups, represented one of the best ways to overcome centuries of discrimination against the most vulnerable groups working in rural areas.

23. In September 2012, at its twenty-first session, the Human Rights Council decided to establish an open-ended intergovernmental working group with the mandate of negotiating, finalizing and submitting to the Council a draft United Nations declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, on the basis of the draft submitted by the Advisory Committee.¹⁹

24. Between July 2013 and April 2018, the open-ended intergovernmental working group held five sessions. The Chair-Rapporteur of the working group recommended that, on the basis of the work of its fifth session, a final version of the draft declaration be prepared and submitted it to the Human Rights Council for its adoption, in fulfilment of the mandate of the working group.²⁰

25. On 28 September 2018, the Human Rights Council adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas and recommended that the General Assembly adopt the Declaration.²¹ The resolution was adopted by a recorded vote with 33 in favour, 3 against and 11 abstentions.

26. On 17 December 2018, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration by 121 votes to 8, with 54 abstentions. The Assembly also invited Governments, agencies and organizations of the United Nations system and intergovernmental and non-governmental

¹⁵ [A/HRC/16/63](#), para. 19.

¹⁶ [A/HRC/19/75](#).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 67.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 74.

¹⁹ Human Rights Council resolution 21/19, para. 1.

²⁰ [A/HRC/39/67](#), para. 93.

²¹ Human Rights Council resolution 39/12, paras. 1 and 2.

organizations to disseminate the Declaration and to promote its universal respect and understanding.²²

IV. Conceptual framework

A. Presentation of the Declaration

27. The adoption of the Declaration represented the culmination of a lengthy process that had started 20 years earlier. Although the Declaration may now be regarded as a “United Nations” declaration, after having been endorsed by the United Nations, it remains first and foremost a peasants’ bill of rights: it was not States that launched the process, but peasants themselves, with the support of their representative organizations. Furthermore, it was not States that shaped its content, but peasants, on the basis of their knowledge and first-hand experience of the discrimination, oppression and social exclusion to which they have been subjected since agriculture started to develop.²³

28. The Working Group wishes to pay tribute to all peasants²⁴ who were involved in the negotiating process of the Declaration for their tenacity and clear-sightedness. The adoption of the Declaration would not have taken place without their unwavering commitment to the equal and effective realization of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all individuals and groups who live and work in rural areas.

29. Far from representing solely a point of arrival, the Declaration also constitutes a new starting point, a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive society that recognizes and values the essential contribution of peasants and people working in rural areas to the fight against poverty and hunger in all their forms and dimensions, the protection of the natural environment from pollution and degradation, the nurturing and regeneration of the biodiversity crucial for sustaining life, the economic and social progress of societies and the realization of peaceful, just and inclusive societies in which no one is left behind and where everyone’s rights are protected equally. From that standpoint, it becomes clear that the implementation of the Declaration constitutes not only a goal in and of itself, but also an essential precondition for the realization of internationally agreed development goals, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²⁵

30. The Declaration consists of 28 articles covering a wide range of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights that are of particular significance to peasants and other people working in rural areas.

31. Articles 1 through 4 contain general provisions that are critical to the implementation of its remaining provisions: the definition of rights holders (art. 1); States’ general obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas (art. 2); and the principles of non-discrimination (art. 3) and gender equality (art. 4). Article 28 contains two additional, crucial rules of interpretation: the prohibition of misuse of the rights recognized in the Declaration; and the saving clause, aimed at preventing any arbitrary and discriminatory restriction in the exercise of the rights set forth therein.

32. In articles 6 through 12, a number of civil and political rights of particular significance for peasants and other people working in rural areas are recognized, including the right to form and join organizations, such as trade unions or cooperatives, for the protection of their interests (art. 9), and the right to active and free participation, directly or through their representative organizations, in decision-making processes that may affect their lives, land and livelihoods (art. 10).

²² See General Assembly resolution 73/165.

²³ See Coline Hubert, *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants: A Tool in the Struggle for our Common Future* (Geneva, Centre Europe – Tiers Monde, 2019).

²⁴ In the present report, the Working Group uses the term “peasants” or “peasants and other people working in rural areas” for the sake of simplicity, without any intention of restricting the list of rights holders identified in article 1 of the Declaration.

²⁵ General Assembly resolution 70/1, seventh preambular paragraph.

33. Articles 13 through 26 are devoted to economic, social and cultural rights. They include a number of rights firmly established in international human rights law, such as the right to work in safe and healthy working conditions (art. 14), the right to adequate food and the fundamental right to be free from hunger (art. 15); the rights to safe and clean drinking water and to sanitation (art. 21); and some emerging rights, such as the rights concerning the access to and sustainable management of the natural resources present in their communities (art. 15), the right to land (art. 17) and the right to seeds (art. 19).

34. The Declaration breaks new ground by recognizing food sovereignty, agroecology, respect for Mother Earth, the special attachment of rights holders to land, territories, water and natural resources, the rights of migrant and undocumented workers, the transboundary aspects of rural livelihoods and natural territories and resources and intersectional forms of discrimination that require coherent and coordinated legal, regulatory and policy actions to address.

35. Furthermore, the challenges faced by rights holders are situated in the Declaration within critical global trends, including climate change, environmental contamination and degradation, power concentration in food systems and power imbalances along value chains, speculation in food products, migration and the increased criminalization of rights holders and their advocates. The rights of women and girls are also highlighted, as are all rights that enable the participation of peasants and their representative organizations in policy and decision-making processes that affect them.

B. Definition of peasants and other people working in rural areas

36. The Working Group wishes to elaborate on the main elements of the definition of rights holders in article 1 of the Declaration.

37. The Declaration is the first international human rights instrument that contains a definition of peasants. Article 1 (1) of the Declaration provides that the term “peasant” refers to any person who engages or who seeks to engage, alone, or in association with others or as a community, in small-scale agricultural production for subsistence and/or for the market. The definition makes it clear that not every person engaged in agriculture qualifies as a peasant: in order to be identified as a peasant, he or she (a) must rely significantly, though not necessarily exclusively, on family or household labour and other non-monetized ways of organizing labour; and (b) must have a special dependency on and attachment to the land.

38. According to article 1 (2), (3) and (4) of the Declaration, specific individuals or groups of individuals working in rural areas may be regarded as peasants, provided that they meet the objective and subjective requirements set out in article 1 (1). Those individuals and groups include:

(a) Any person engaged in artisanal or small-scale agriculture, crop planting, livestock raising, pastoralism, fishing, forestry, hunting or gathering, and handicrafts related to agriculture or a related occupation in a rural area;

(b) Indigenous Peoples and local communities working on the land, transhumant, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities and the landless engaged in the above-mentioned activities;

(c) Hired workers, including all migrant workers regardless of their migration status and seasonal workers, on plantations, agricultural farms, forests and farms in aquaculture and in agro-industrial enterprises.

39. The Working Group wishes to stress that the term “other people working in rural areas” must be interpreted in an extensive way so as to include not only persons engaged in agriculture, but also in livestock raising, pastoralism, crop planting, forestry, fishing, hunting, gathering and handicrafts related to agriculture or a related occupation in a rural area, as well as dependent family members of peasants and other people working in rural areas.

40. Similarly, the subjective element of having “a special dependency on and attachment to the land” must also be interpreted extensively. The preamble to the Declaration expressly recognizes the special relationship and interaction between peasants and other people

working in rural areas and the land, water and nature to which they are attached and on which they depend for their livelihood (sixth preambular paragraph). The reference to land in article 1 (1) should therefore be interpreted as including any environmental media, such as grazing, common and coastal lands, forests, freshwater and marine ecosystems and fishing grounds and waters, and all natural resources that peasants and other people working in rural areas may have a special dependency on and attachment to for their livelihoods and ways of life.

41. The Working Group considers that, rather than externally defining peasants and other people working in rural areas, the most fruitful approach forward is that of peasant self-identification by individuals and their families, as is the case with Indigenous Peoples.

42. It should be noted that peasants and other people working in rural areas maintain their identities regardless of any modification in their status due to changing socioeconomic circumstances. For example, members of rural communities maintain their status of peasant even when they are compelled by economic hardship, environmental degradation or diminishing natural resources to leave their land and seek employment as hired workers in agricultural, forestry and aquaculture enterprises.

C. Non-discrimination

43. The Declaration recognizes that peasants and other people working in rural areas have been subjected to severe forms of discrimination and social, economic and political exclusion that have undermined the equal and effective enjoyment of their human rights and denied them the opportunity to secure sustainable and dignified livelihoods.

44. It is noted with concern in the Declaration that peasants and other people working in rural areas suffer disproportionately from poverty, hunger and malnutrition (eighth preambular paragraph). This is due to a number of reasons, foremost of which are small or marginal land holdings, landlessness and insufficient access to productive and natural resources. Those conditions are further exacerbated by the adverse impact of climate change, natural disasters, environmental degradation and the loss of biodiversity (ninth preambular paragraph), which compound already existing financial and economic pressures. Ageing and a lack of economic diversification in rural areas are additional areas of concern (tenth preambular paragraph).

45. Landless families account for a significant percentage of rural poor facing chronic food insecurity, who survive as tenant farmers, sharecroppers or poorly paid agricultural workers. Tenant farmers and sharecroppers face high rents and economic insecurity from season to season. Agricultural and aquacultural workers are paid low wages insufficient to feed their families and are compelled to move from one insecure job to another.²⁶

46. The Declaration contains a recognition of the importance of land and associated resources for the realization of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. In its general comment No. 26 (2022) on land and economic, social and cultural rights, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights noted that land played an essential role in the realization of several rights under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and that secure and equitable access to, use of and control over land for individuals and communities could be essential to eradicate hunger and poverty and to guarantee the right to an adequate standard of living.²⁷

47. Many peasant and rural families face chronic, intergenerational indebtedness, resulting in the mortgaging or loss of land and productive assets and the migration of family members to seek off-farm employment to service their debts.

48. Inadequate and insufficient public investment in social services and protection and infrastructure, especially relating to health, education, water, sanitation, energy and transportation, render many rural populations extremely vulnerable to diseases, natural disasters and physical hardships. A lack of public investment in territorial markets, rural credit and economic incentives suited to the challenges faced by peasants and other people

²⁶ A/HRC/19/75, para. 15.

²⁷ Paras. 6–11.

working in rural areas deepens systemic discrimination against them, pushing them into a state of continuing economic marginalization.²⁸

49. The prioritization of urban development, large-scale commercial enterprises in agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and livestock and economic development projects and policies that enclose and expropriate land and other natural resources has resulted in the marginalization of rural livelihoods and the exclusion of rural peoples in policymaking relating to land, forest and water use and biodiversity and environmental protection. As a result, peasants and other people working in rural areas face increasing tenure insecurity, forcible eviction and dispossession from means of production and survival.²⁹

50. In many parts of the world, the traditional ways of life and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and peasants who subsist on forest resources, hunting, fishing, and herding are increasingly threatened by economic development projects, for example the extractive industry, dams, power plants, mega-infrastructure projects and economic corridors, the creation of forest reserves that restrict their rights and competition over natural and productive resources. Indigenous Peoples, local communities and peasants face increasing threats of displacement from ancestral domains and lands, fishers face restrictions in access to traditional fishing waters and the seasonal routes of nomadic and transhumant communities are barred by the privatization of common lands and increasing cross-border restrictions.³⁰

51. Rural workers on plantations and in agro-industrial enterprises and commercial aquaculture and fisheries are frequently exposed to hazardous and exploitative work conditions and denied living wages, adequate food, shelter and health care, social protection and the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

52. Article 3 (1) of the Declaration provides that peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other international human rights instruments, free from any kind of discrimination based on any grounds such as origin, nationality, race, colour, descent, sex, language, culture, marital status, property, disability, age, political or other opinion, religion, birth or economic, social or other status.

53. As already noted in paragraph 19 of the present report, the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, in both its preliminary and final studies, found that the main causes of discrimination and vulnerability of peasants and other people working in rural areas were closely linked to human rights violations: (a) expropriation of land, forced evictions and displacement; (b) gender discrimination; (c) the absence of agrarian reform and rural development policies; (d) the lack of minimum wages and social protection; and (e) the criminalization of movements defending the rights of people working in rural areas.³¹

54. Article 2 (1) of the Declaration contains the requirement that States respect, protect and fulfil the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas and to take legislative, administrative and other appropriate steps to achieve progressively the full realization of the rights set forth in the Declaration that cannot be immediately guaranteed. Article 3 (3) provides that States shall adopt appropriate measures to eliminate conditions that cause or help to perpetuate discrimination, including multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, against peasants and other people working in rural areas.

55. The Working Group is of the view that many forms of discrimination against peasants and people working in rural areas are of a systemic and structural nature. In order to address them, it is essential to recognize and tackle adequately the social, economic and political factors that entrench and perpetuate discrimination and the tensions between the rights set out in the Declaration, on the one hand, and the broader economic interests that shape national, regional and international development plans and policies, on the other. This could entail, for example, assessing the impacts of existing trade and investment agreements or household and national debt conditions and fiscal policies on the rights of peasants and other people

²⁸ International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems, *Food from Somewhere: Building Food Security and Resilience through Territorial Markets* (2024).

²⁹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 26 (2022), paras. 1 and 2.

³⁰ [A/HRC/19/75](#), paras. 18–21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, para. 24; and [A/HRC/16/63](#), para. 19.

working in rural areas, or analysing the role of public investment and regulation in advancing the implementation of the Declaration.

56. In the discharge of its mandate, the Working Group will seek to identify the various forms of discrimination affecting peasants and other people working in rural areas and their adverse impacts on the enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. To do so, the Working Group intends to consult with and receive information from all stakeholders identified in Human Rights Council resolution 54/9, including States, the rights holders as defined in article 1 of the Declaration, national human rights institutions, United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes, international and regional human rights mechanisms and civil society organizations. As requested in the resolution, the Working Group will pay particular attention to the identification, collection and promotion of good practices and lessons learned on the implementation of the rights set out in the Declaration.

57. Country visits will offer an invaluable opportunity to collect first-hand information on the various forms of discrimination and exclusion to which peasants and other people working in rural areas have been exposed and on the measures adopted by State authorities to eliminate the underlying causes of discrimination.

58. The communication procedure will enable the Working Group to identify patterns of discrimination and exclusion at the national and regional levels and to formulate appropriate recommendations on how to prevent and redress discrimination and abuse faced by peasants and other individuals working in rural areas.

59. The Working Group intends to devote portions of its sessions to raising awareness among States and non-State actors of the various forms of discrimination and exclusion affecting peasants and other people working in rural areas, with a view to discussing their causes and adverse impacts on rights holders and identifying appropriate measures to minimize or eliminate them.

60. In accordance with articles 2 (2) and 3 (3) of the Declaration, the Working Group will pay particular attention to the rights and special needs of those peasants and other people working in rural areas who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and abuse, including older persons, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities. In formulating its recommendations on measures to eliminate conditions that cause or help to perpetuate discrimination, the Working Group will pay particular attention to the need to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against peasants and other people working in rural areas.

D. Peasant women

61. Peasant women and other rural women produce between 60 and 80 per cent of food crops in developing countries and earn incomes to feed their families, but account for 70 per cent of the world's hungry and are disproportionately affected by malnutrition, poverty and food insecurity. In many countries, they suffer multiple forms of discrimination, including based on their being women and poor, rural residents or Indigenous and rarely owning land or other assets.³²

62. Peasant women and other rural women carry most of the unpaid work burden owing to stereotyped gender roles and, even when formally employed, they are more often engaged in work that is insecure, hazardous, poorly paid and not covered by social protection. Peasant women are less likely to be educated and are at higher risk of being trafficked and forced into labour and child and forced marriage. They are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and lack access to justice and effective legal remedies. They are also disadvantaged

³² [A/HRC/19/75](#), paras. 9, 22, 23 and 29. See also Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women, paras. 14 and 22.

with respect to access to health care and are more likely to become ill or die from preventable causes.³³

63. Women living and working in rural areas often face systemic discrimination, especially with regard to security of land tenure, access to, use of and control over land, marital property and inheritance and exclusion from decision-making processes, including in the context of communal forms of land tenure.³⁴ They also face discriminatory treatment with regard to access to and control over other productive resources, such as water, seeds and credit.

64. Discrimination can be enshrined in national legislation, for instance in family and succession laws restricting women's inheritance rights, and in stereotypes and customary practices, which are often more prevalent in rural areas.³⁵

65. Peasant women and other women working in rural areas are recognized in the Declaration as playing a significant role in the economic survival and well-being of their families and in contributing to the rural and national economy, including through their work in the informal economy, but often being subjected to various forms of discrimination, violence and social and political exclusion that prevent or limit the effective exercise of their human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with men (thirteenth preambular paragraph).

66. Article 4 (1) of the Declaration contains the requirement that States adopt all appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against peasant women and other women working in rural areas and to promote their empowerment in order to ensure their full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with men. In article 4 (2), States are called upon to ensure that peasant women and other women working in rural areas enjoy without discrimination all the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the Declaration and in other international human rights instruments. That provision includes a list of 10 rights that are particularly relevant for overcoming the intersectional discrimination experienced by rural women in specific contexts, such as health, social security, education and access to financial services, agricultural credit and loans.

67. In carrying out its mandate, the Working Group will adopt a gender lens and pay particular attention to the specific situation of peasant women and girls and the multi-level forms of discrimination that they experience in many countries and globally. In doing so, the Working Group will be mindful of the fact that rural women are not a homogeneous group and face intersectional discrimination that needs to be addressed through multiple, multilevel actions and measures.

68. In raising awareness about the particular situations and needs of rural women and clarifying the legal obligations of States as set out in article 4 of the Declaration, the Working Group intends to work closely with relevant human rights mechanisms and the United Nations entities dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. They include the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the International Labour Organization.

69. The Working Group will seek information from organizations of peasant women and other women working in rural areas and other civil society organizations focused on advancing the rights of women, as well as from States, academics and other stakeholders, on the situation of rural women in their country or region and on the measures adopted to eliminate all forms of discrimination against rural women and ensure that the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms is on an equal basis with that of men. The Working Group will focus in particular on collecting information on special measures and

³³ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 34 (2016), paras. 5 and 6.

³⁴ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 26 (2022), para. 13.

³⁵ [A/HRC/19/75](#), paras. 29 and 30. See also Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 34 (2016), para. 22.

good practices adopted at the national and regional levels to redress discrimination and violence and challenges in the implementation of the Declaration.

E. Promoting the dissemination of the Declaration

70. Article 2 (1) provides that States shall respect, protect and fulfil the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas and take legislative, administrative and other appropriate steps to achieve the full realization of the rights set forth in the Declaration.

71. The Working Group considers that the dissemination of the Declaration, its translation into local languages and the organization of educational and awareness-raising activities on the Declaration are among the other steps that may be considered appropriate for the purposes of implementing article 2 (1).

72. A crucial first step in the implementation of the Declaration is its dissemination among State officials, policymakers, rights holders as defined in article 1, academics, research institutions, private sector enterprises, civil society organizations and the general public.

73. Peasants and other people working in rural areas will be the first beneficiaries of educational activities aimed at raising awareness of the Declaration and the rights set forth therein. Awareness-raising is essential to inform and educate peasants and other people working in rural areas. Without prior knowledge of their rights and the corresponding obligations of States and non-State actors, peasants and their representative organizations cannot take part in any meaningful consultative process initiated by States pursuant to article 2 (3) prior to the adoption and implementation of legislation or policies that may affect the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.

74. Article 2 (5) provides that States shall take all necessary measures to ensure that non-State actors, including transnational corporations and other business enterprises, respect and strengthen the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. The Working Group considers that the dissemination of the Declaration to private sector enterprises involved in agriculture, aquaculture or fishing should be regarded as one of the necessary measures envisaged in the provision. By disseminating the Declaration, States can ensure that business entities are aware of the rights of people working on agricultural farms and plantations and in aquaculture and agro-industrial enterprises and that those entities carry out their activities in ways that are consistent with the obligations arising from the Declaration.

75. Article 2 (5) should be read and interpreted in conjunction with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. According to the Guiding Principles, business enterprises are expected to respect human rights, meaning that they should avoid infringing on the human rights of others and should address adverse human rights impacts with which they are involved. Principle 8 provides that States should ensure that governmental departments, agencies and other State-based institutions that shape business practices are aware of and observe the State's human rights obligations when fulfilling their respective mandates, including by providing them with relevant information, training and support.

76. The Working Group underscores that the effective dissemination of the Declaration presupposes its translation into national and local languages. The precedent of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which has been translated into over 70 languages (in full text or in a one-page summary), represents a good practice that should be followed to facilitate the dissemination of the Declaration and improve understanding of the human rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. The translation of the Declaration should be accompanied by the development of outreach materials in the relevant languages.

77. In line with their obligations under article 2 (1) and (6) of the Declaration, the Working Group recommends that States allocate adequate financial resources to the translation of the Declaration in national and local languages. Recognizing the importance of international cooperation in support of national efforts for the realization of the purposes and objectives of the Declaration, the Working Group also encourages States in a position to do so to allocate financial resources in the context of development cooperation to facilitate the

dissemination of the Declaration, including through its translation into local languages, the exchange and sharing of information on the Declaration and the organization of training programmes for Government officials and civil society.

F. Promoting the implementation of the Declaration

78. The dissemination of the Declaration is not an end in and of itself but rather a precondition to ensuring its effective implementation at the national, regional and international levels. The resolution establishing the mandate of the Working Group requests it to promote the effective and comprehensive dissemination and implementation of the Declaration, while identifying challenges and gaps in its implementation at the national, regional and international levels, and to make recommendations in that regard.³⁶

79. The following general principles will guide the Working Group in the discharge of its mandate:

(a) **Multi-constituency approach** Article 1 of the Declaration makes it clear that peasants and other people working in rural areas do not constitute a homogeneous group. Emphasizing their heterogeneity, and thus the particular situation and needs of different groups of peasants and other people working in rural areas, the Working Group will seek to prevent any competition or conflict between different rights holders and their demands and to foster dialogue and cooperation among them in prioritizing issues to focus on and developing recommendations on how to address those issues;

(b) **Vulnerable groups** In line with article 2 (2) of the Declaration, the Working Group will pay particular attention to the rights and special needs of specific groups of peasants and other people working in rural areas that are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and abuse, including older persons, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities;

(c) **Participation** Article 10 (1) of the Declaration provides that peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to active and free participation, directly and through their representative organizations, in the preparation and implementation of policies, programmes and projects that may affect their lives, land and livelihoods.³⁷ In line with that provision, the Working Group intends to consult with rights holders and their representative organizations in the development of recommendations on how to implement the different rights set out in the Declaration.

80. In accordance with the mandate entrusted to it by the Human Rights Council, the Working Group intends to take a wide range of actions to assist States in the implementation of the Declaration, including the following:

(a) Organizing awareness-raising and capacity-building activities on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas;

(b) Seeking and assessing information from all relevant sources on progress made and difficulties encountered in implementing the Declaration;

(c) Identifying, exchanging and promoting good practices and lessons learned on the implementation of the Declaration;

(d) Liaising with human rights treaty bodies and thematic special procedures with a view to increasing attention to the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas in their work;

(e) Highlighting, in close coordination with relevant stakeholders, the human rights obligations of business enterprises in relation to peasants and other people working in rural areas;

³⁶ Human Rights Council resolution 54/9, para. 2 (a).

³⁷ The Declaration contains several provisions on the consultation and participation of peasants and their representative organizations in the decision-making processes affecting them: articles 2 (3), 4 (2) (a), 5 (2) (b), 13 (6), 15 (5) and 27 (1).

(f) Mainstreaming the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas in the interpretation and application of other international instruments, for instance on development, trade, investments, climate change and environmental protection.

81. The Working Group intends to carry out its mandate in close coordination with OHCHR, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, the human rights treaty bodies, relevant United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes and civil society organizations, including those representing the interests of peasants and other people working in rural areas. The Working Group considers that such strategic partnerships are essential to identify and address protection gaps, avoid duplication and ensure a consistent approach to the realization of peasants' rights and fundamental freedoms.

82. During its first year, the Working Group intends, as a matter of priority, to get a clearer picture on the progress made in the implementation of the Declaration and the protection of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas through various means. It intends to consult States, rights holders as defined in article 1 of the Declaration and their representative organizations, treaty bodies, special procedures, United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes and civil society organizations on the activities that they have carried out to promote the implementation of the Declaration at the national, regional and international levels.

83. That process will comprise a series of online and in-person consultations with stakeholders, which will be held in the coming months. Prior to its second session, the Working Group will issue a call for input to seek and receive information from all relevant sources on the progress made and difficulties encountered in the implementation of the Declaration at the national, regional and international levels. The responses received will help the Working Group to identify the priority issues on which to focus over the next two years.

V. Methods of work

A. Sessions

84. The Working Group will hold three sessions per year, two in Geneva and one in New York. Each session will cover five working days. The sessions are expected to follow approximately the same calendar, namely one session towards the end of February, another in May in New York, and the last one in October or November.

85. Sessions will be held in person and conducted in closed meetings.

86. The Working Group has decided that, in the future, it would use the convening capacity of the sessions to reach out to the stakeholders referred to in the Human Rights Council resolution establishing its mandate.³⁸ Part of the session may be used to organize, on an ad hoc basis, consultations with rights holders, days of general discussion on a specific topic or public consultations with States and other stakeholders.

87. The second session of the Working Group will be held in Geneva from 21 to 25 October 2024. The third session will be held in Geneva from 24 to 28 February 2025. The fourth session will be held in New York from 19 to 23 May 2025 (dates to be confirmed). The fifth session will be held in Geneva from 17 to 21 November 2025.

88. Due to the liquidity crisis affecting the Secretariat, the Working Group might be able to convene only two sessions in 2025.

³⁸ Human Rights Council resolution 54/9, para. 2 (b) and (c).

B. Functioning of the Working Group

1. Election of the Chair and other officers

89. The Working Group shall identify from among its members a Chair-Rapporteur and two Vice-Chairs.

90. The role of the Chair is to perform the functions conferred upon him or her by the resolution establishing the Working Group, the methods of work and the decisions of the Working Group. The Chair represents the Working Group before the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, participates in the annual meeting of the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and chairs the sessions of the Working Group.

91. The Chair is also responsible for several additional tasks, including:

- (a) Establishing the agenda for the Working Group sessions, in collaboration with the secretariat;
- (b) Signing official correspondence, including communications;
- (c) Taking decisions on behalf of the Working Group outside the sessions, in consultation with the other members of the Working Group.

92. The role of Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group will rotate on an annual basis. The rotation of the role of Chair is aimed at ensuring an equitable geographical representation and an appropriate gender balance. The next rotation will take place in May 2025, at the fourth session of the Working Group.

93. The role of the Vice-Chairs is to fulfil the duties of the Chair-Rapporteur whenever he or she is unavailable. One of the Vice-Chairs will normally become Chair-Rapporteur at the end of the mandate of the current Chair-Rapporteur. The other Vice-Chair acts as the focal point for individual communications and performs any other task that the Chair-Rapporteur may decide to delegate to him or her.

94. The role of the two Vice-Chairs will rotate on an annual basis, during the May session of the Working Group. The next rotation will take place in May 2025.

95. The Working Group may appoint at any time a rapporteur on specific issues of interest.

96. In the exercise of their functions, the Chair and the Vice-Chairs remain under the authority of the Working Group.

2. Intersessional activities

97. Members of the Working Group engage in intersessional activities in their official capacity as members of the Working Group. Any intersessional activity carried out by members of the Working Group that have a connection with the mandate of the Working Group will be covered by the present methods of work.

98. Members engaging in intersessional activities should inform the other members of the Working Group and the secretariat in advance and report back to the Working Group on the activity that they have carried out in their official capacity. They are not authorized to make commitments or decisions on behalf of the Working Group, unless a specific authority has been delegated to them by the Working Group.

99. Members should avoid any type of actual or potential conflict of interest while engaging in intersessional activities.

3. Decision-making

100. Decisions of the Working Group are adopted by consensus.

101. When not in session, the Working Group members will be consulted by email and provided a reasonable time frame in which to respond. When a situation requires an urgent decision, the Chair of the Working Group or the focal point on communications may expressly indicate that a decision will be adopted unless a member of the Working Group raises a reasoned objection within a reasonable time frame.

102. Where consensus is not reached, the view of a majority of the members of the Working Group is adopted as the view of the Working Group.

C. Annual reports

103. The Working Group will submit annual thematic reports to the Human Rights Council and to the General Assembly.³⁹

104. The report to the Human Rights Council will be presented each year at the September session of the Council. The report to the General Assembly will be presented to the Third Committee of the General Assembly in October or November of each year.

105. The aim of the thematic report is to assist States and non-State actors in implementing the Declaration at the national level by clarifying the content of the rights set out therein and the corresponding obligations of States and other entities.

106. The Working Group will normally decide the topic of the two reports and identify the member(s) responsible for drafting them at the November session. Prior to the preparation of its thematic reports, the Working Group may seek input from States and other stakeholders through a call for input that will be published on the web page of the Working Group.

D. Country visits

107. The Working Group shall conduct two country visits per year.

108. Country visits offer an invaluable opportunity to collect first-hand information on the efforts made at the national level to promote the effective and comprehensive dissemination and implementation of the Declaration and to identify the challenges and gaps in its implementation. In addition, such visits offer the opportunity to identify and promote good practices and lessons learned on the implementation of the Declaration.

109. The Working Group shall not undertake visits to countries for which the Human Rights Council has already appointed a country rapporteur, unless the country rapporteur considers the visit by the Working Group to be useful.

110. Up to three members of the Working Group will participate in each country mission. The Chair will decide, in consultation with all the other members, which members will participate in any particular mission.

111. To the extent possible, the member of the Working Group from the region in which the country visit takes place will be chosen to accompany the mission. Members of the Working Group will seek to avoid conducting official visits to their country of origin, however.

112. In accordance with standard practice, the composition of the visiting delegation will be communicated to the Government concerned prior to the visit.

E. Communications

113. Within the framework of its mandate, the Working Group may send communications to States or non-State actors on alleged human rights abuses against peasants and other persons working in rural areas.

114. Relevant information may be submitted by any individual or group who is the direct or indirect victim of the alleged abuses or by a civil society organization or national human rights institution claiming to have direct or reliable knowledge of those allegations. The Working Group will review the information received with a view to taking appropriate action.

115. When the Working Group considers that the information received is sufficient to establish *prima facie* evidence of the alleged abuses, it may address a communication to the

³⁹ Human Rights Council resolution 54/9, para. 2 (e).

State or the non-State actor allegedly responsible for the abuse (e.g. an international organization or a business enterprise) to present the allegations and request clarifications on the allegations received.

116. Where necessary, the Working Group may request that the national authorities concerned take action to prevent or stop the violation, investigate it, bring to justice those responsible and ensure that remedies are available to the victim(s) or their families.

117. Such interventions may relate to human rights violations that have already occurred, are ongoing or have a high risk of occurring. They may also raise concerns relating to bills, legislation, policies, economic agreements and practices that do not comply with international human rights law and standards relating to the protection and promotion of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.

118. When relevant, the Working Group may send communications jointly with other special procedure mandate holders.

119. Communications sent and replies received will remain confidential until they are published in a joint communications report submitted to the Human Rights Council at each of its regular sessions, held in March, June and September. In certain situations, including those of grave concern, the Working Group may issue a public statement.

120. The Vice-Chair of the Working Group acting as focal point on communications will make an initial assessment of the allegations received and provide his or her preliminary views on the proposed course of action to the Working Group.

121. Decisions on whether to send a communication are taken by the Working Group on a non-objection basis. For communications that are not time-sensitive, members of the Working Group have 48 hours in which to express their dissenting views on the course of action proposed by the focal point on communications.

F. Engagement with stakeholders

1. States

122. The Working Group intends to develop and maintain a constructive dialogue with States and will seek the full engagement of States from all regions on issues relevant to its mandate. The dialogue will take the form of consultations, technical assistance, capacity-building, letters soliciting information on good practices and lessons learned on the implementation of the Declaration and the dissemination of questionnaires on specific issues of concern.

2. Rights holders

123. The Working Group believes that partnerships with rights holders as defined in article 1 of the Declaration are essential to the fulfilment of its mandate. As noted in section III of the present report, the Declaration is the result of over a decade of engagement by peasant organizations with the Human Rights Council and the international human rights community. The Working Group will seek the involvement and facilitate the participation of rights holders through their organizations and communities in all regions in the implementation of its mandate. This will be accomplished through dissemination, outreach, awareness-raising, dialogues and the solicitation of information and input, as outlined above.

3. Human rights mechanisms

124. The Working Group subscribes to the absolute importance given by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 54/9 to coordination with OHCHR, the special procedures, the treaty bodies and other human rights mechanisms.

125. The Working Group intends to reach out to selected special procedure mandate holders and treaty bodies to discuss issues of common interest and possible modes of cooperation.

126. Similarly, the Working Group considers it a high priority to learn about the views, issues and concerns of different regions in relation to the implementation of the Declaration. In that regard, the Working Group intends to explore cooperation with regional human rights organizations and expert mechanisms.

4. United Nations and other international organizations

127. The Working Group aims to build constructive partnerships with relevant United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes, international organizations and regional mechanisms. The Working Group intends to organize meetings with relevant international organizations and bodies and to consult them on issues falling within their fields of expertise.

5. Other stakeholders

128. The Working Group believes that collaboration with civil society organizations is essential to the fulfilment of its mandate. Civil society organizations have a central role to play in disseminating and supporting the implementation of the Declaration at the national and regional levels and can assist the Working Group in identifying challenges and gaps in its implementation at the national, regional and international levels.

129. The Working Group intends to organize regular meetings with Geneva-based non-governmental organizations working on relevant issues during its regular sessions and to solicit input from other non-governmental organizations in various regions in relation to the different aspects of its mandate.

130. The Working Group also intends to engage with other non-State actors, especially academics, researchers and research institutions, legal experts, trade unions, social movements and business enterprises, through consultations, working meetings and collaborative activities, as relevant.
