



International Day of Peasant Struggles: In the face of war and crisis, ECVC demands action towards food sovereignty

To:

**President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen,
European Commissioner for Climate, and Commission Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans,
European Commissioner for Trade, Executive vice-president, Chair the Commissioners' Group on an Economy that Works for People, Valdis Dombrovskis
European Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski,
European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella Kyriakides,
European Commissioner for the Environment, Virginijus Sinkevičius
President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron
French Minister for Agriculture, Julien De Normandie
Members of the European Parliament,
President of the European Council, Charles Michel**

CC: European citizens,

In the build up to the International Day of Peasant Struggles on 17 April, European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) would like to express its sadness and solidarity for all victims of the war in Ukraine and current or recent armed conflicts, such as in Yemen, Syria, Myanmar, Libya, Colombia, Palestine, Western Sahara and beyond. We would like to express our solidarity with the peasants of these countries who, despite everything, continue their work to produce food for the populations of their region.

These wars and armed conflicts cause terrible suffering for the civilian populations of the countries concerned. They also have repercussions at the international level, notably by highlighting the fragilities that exist within the food and energy supply chains.

This is in addition to the urgent and worrying social, environmental, and food-related crises that have been highlighted and exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic over the past two years, which continue to impact food security¹. European society has been subjected to chronic levels of destruction, not least because international institutions and national governments have failed to address numerous structural issues in recent history. For too long, the interests of the powerful few have been allowed to prevail over the needs and priorities of citizens.

Therefore, in the context of the International Day of Peasant Struggles, ECVC addresses policy makers and institutional figures to demand that control of our food and production systems is put once again in the hands of the population, in the form of food sovereignty. We also address allies and citizens of the European Union, asking them to demand this change and accountability for the future of our food systems through public policy.

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It offers people and societies direct, democratic control over how they feed and nourish themselves, how to use and maintain land, water and other resources for the benefit of current and future generations,

and how to interact with other groups, peoples and cultures based on international solidarity. Despite the increasingly common and dangerous tendency of other actors to hijack the term to benefit their own political vision, food sovereignty was conceptualised by La Via Campesina in 1996 and defined in the Nyéléni declaration², a global movement comprised of organisations fighting for food sovereignty.

The right to food sovereignty is recognised in Article 15 of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas³ (UNDROP) and the EU must do more to support the implementation of this right. As an organisation representing small- and medium-scale farmers across Europe, ECVV takes this opportunity to address some of the systemic causes of agricultural issues on which the European Institutions must act and on which European citizens must mobilise to ensure accountability and change. As the voice of small-scale farmers, in this letter ECVV outlines its vision of sustainable food production for the future, and reiterates that to achieve this vision we must rebuild Europe's food sovereignty through agroecology, ensuring fair incomes for farmers and agricultural workers and guaranteeing access to land, market and resources for small- and medium-scale farmers.

Food sovereignty: an international solidarity response to the current multidimensional crisis

The belief that international trade is the key to ensuring food security has long been the mantra of the European Union and has shaped its agricultural politics. As ECVV, we have consistently denounced this false idea and demanded, within an overall shift towards food sovereignty, the relocalisation of food systems through measures that support small-scale farmers instead of putting them in competition with cheap, imported industrial production on a global scale.

International neoliberal policies have pushed all countries to specialise in producing what they can best export, instead of ensuring a stable basis of food production for feeding their own people. More than 50 countries now depend heavily on wheat and grain imports and risk suffering food insecurity because they are very vulnerable to food price inflation. We consider that the EU is majorly responsible in this situation, because it has constantly pushed within WTO and through bilateral free-trade agreements for more market access for European agri-food business, to dismantle public food stocks and to reduce market regulation that could ensure fair prices for small-scale producers.

This culminates in speculation mechanisms and private food stocks which cause price volatility in international markets, and put into question the future of food supplies. Even in this situation of war, global wheat and grain stocks do not justify such rapid price increases.

ECVV, on the other hand, defends trade which respects and protects the livelihoods of farmers in each country and/or territory as a pillar of ensuring food security and food sovereignty for communities, countries and unions of countries as well as on a global level.

Food sovereignty: The best way forward within the European Union

Food sovereignty is not only a proven solid response to the crisis that low income countries are experiencing. It is also the most appropriate action for farmers, agricultural and non-agricultural workers, citizens, consumers, and the environment within Europe.

By implementing food sovereignty, the EU can ensure continued commitment towards addressing the current environmental and social crises it faces. True agroecological transition offers a huge opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions⁴, to raise the income of farmers and rural populations from below the poverty line and to ensure food security within the EU. However, this requires systemic and paradigm change, and not the promotion of isolated agroecological practices to be implemented within systems that are socially and environmentally unsustainable at their core.

To make these changes, both within the EU and on the international level, ECVC suggests the following steps are taken:

- ⇒ **Ensure prices that cover the costs of production and guarantee fair income for farmers and agricultural workers:** Fair income should be ensured through market regulation measures. Farmers must be guaranteed prices that cover the costs of healthy and sustainable production, including covering fair wages and working conditions for agricultural workers employed on farms. Buying from farmers below the costs of production should be prohibited. For this, we encourage the EU Member States to continue their work on the national translation of the EU Unfair Trading Practices directive, a positive example of which is the law passed in Spain⁵ in January 2022. In the meantime, CAP subsidies should be distributed based on the actual work of farmers instead of using the current hectare-based system and in line with the principle of social conditionality, respecting the social and labour rights of agricultural workers.
- ⇒ **Ensure a robust policy framework to deal with and be better prepared in case of food crisis.** ECVC welcomes the creation of the European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism (EFSCM). Faced with multidimensional crisis, it is crucial that the EU better values the key role of the 10 million European small-scale farmers for ensuring food sovereignty, food security and the unity of European societies. **ECVC supports the creation of strategic public food stocks at the national level in each EU member state as well as of an EU coordination mechanism.**
- ⇒ **Reconsider the effect of EU international trading negotiation positions and make a radical shift towards food sovereignty.** The EU should urgently assess the terrifying role speculation plays in the increase of food prices and take courageous action to prevent speculation on agricultural commodities. The EU should conduct negotiations within the FAO Committee on Commodity Problems with the low income countries which are import-dependent to ensure that European grain production reaches these countries at a fair price.
- ⇒ **Remove agriculture from FTAs and the WTO, making food sovereignty the priority for European food, agricultural and international trade policies:** ECVC underlines that food, as a basic human right, cannot be treated as a commodity. Agriculture must be therefore removed from FTAs and we must agree that the WTO is not the appropriate space to discuss food and agricultural issues. We also call on the EU to give a higher priority to multilateral and democratic UN spaces such as the Committee on Food Security and FAO to build international cooperation and solidarity towards food sovereignty.
- ⇒ **Guarantee access to land:** ECVC vehemently rejects the speculation of land and agricultural resources and demands that legislation is put in place at the European level to stop this. ECVC itself is working on a European Directive proposal on how to govern land tenure to ensure the rights of peasant farmers and rural communities are respected, in line with the UNDROP.
- ⇒ **Implement public policy to facilitate a transition towards peasants' agroecology and increased autonomy in agricultural processes:** Sadly, the climate and biodiversity crisis did not suddenly disappear with the war in Ukraine. Faced with the global consequences of our reliance on the food and food related export/import policy, which for example has created

dependency on synthetic fertilisers from Russia and cereal crops imported from Russia and Ukraine, Europe must support models of production that are based on autonomy. Diversified agriculture combining livestock production and mixed crops is the best option both in terms of autonomy and for the environment. For this reason, more than ever, ECVC calls the EU to move forward in implementing the objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy (by reducing the use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, antibiotics etc.)

- ⇒ **Commit to truly addressing the current environmental crisis:** True agroecological transition offers a huge opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: several studies⁶ show that the absorption of greenhouse gases by the soil is much more efficient when it is worked according to the principles of agroecology. However, the EU cannot simply promote isolated agroecological practices to be checked off from a catalogue (as is the case in the carbon farming file, for example) without guaranteeing the systemic and contextual change, needed to make them effective.

The EU Institutions have long since failed to tackle the challenges facing European agriculture and the very serious fragilities of the current food distribution, processing and production systems. They have instead continued to insist that the present system works, supporting large corporate interests and opting for solutions that have proved to be inefficient, unpredictable and that are yet to offer any real results.

At this dangerous crossroads in European history, this approach becomes increasingly irresponsible and irrevocable. The environmental, social and economic challenges in Europe have not improved but rather got worse and we cannot trust short-term and false solutions anymore.

Faced with clear proof of the enormous flaws of the present system further exposed by the war in Ukraine and by the coronavirus pandemic, it is time to act.

ECVC urges policy makers to act to ensure the implementation of this systemic vision of food sovereignty and asks allies and citizens of the European Union to demand change and accountability for the future of our food systems through public policy. This is a question of human rights, of farmers' rights and of citizens' rights that can no longer be ignored.

¹ Voices from the ground: From COVID-19 to radical transformation of our food systems
<https://www.csm4cfs.org/csm-global-synthesis-report-covid-19/>

² Declaration of the Forum for Food Sovereignty, Nyéléni 2007, <https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>

³ the UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas
<https://viacampesina.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UNDROP-Book-of-Illustrations-I-EN-I-Web.pdf>

⁴ Agroecology and carbon neutrality in Europe by 2050: what are the issues?
<https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/study/agroecology-and-carbon-neutrality-europe-2050-what-are-issues>

⁵ Press release from La Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos (COAG),
<http://coag.chil.me/post/tras-la-aprobacion-definitiva-de-la-ley-de-cadena-alimentaria-en-el-congreso-coa-371449>

⁶ Agroecology and carbon neutrality in Europe by 2050: what are the issues?
<https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/study/agroecology-and-carbon-neutrality-europe-2050-what-are-issues>

The International Day of Peasant Struggle is celebrated on April 17, to commemorate the massacre of landless peasants in 1996 in Eldorado dos Carajás, Brazil, who were fighting for comprehensive agrarian reform. This is a tragic example of the countless struggles of peasants around the world who fight every day to continue to feed the planet.