



June 28, 2021, Brussels

**To the attention of Mrs Ursula Von Der Leyen, President of the European Commission,
Mr. Frans Timmermans, Vice-President and Commissioner for Climate Change,
Mr Janusz Wojciechowski , Commissioner for Agriculture,
Ms Roberta Metsola , President of the European Parliament,
Ms Dunja Mijatović , Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights,**

Subject: Call for attention and action on the authoritarian drift currently taking place in France

Dear Presidents, Dear Commissioners,

We, the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC), are a confederation of trade unions and organizations of peasants, small and medium-sized farmers and agricultural workers across Europe. We are currently composed of 31 national and regional farmers' organizations from 21 European countries.

We wish to express our concern at the actions of the French government, which represses organizations and puts in custody individuals who demand the preservation and equitable sharing of water. We consider this repression to be unacceptable within the democratic framework which should be the norm in Europe. Instead of finding real answers to the environmental, social and democratic crises, the French government chooses to imprison activists and ban movements critical of the extractivist agribusiness model.

The French farmer union Confédération Paysanne is one of the French members of ECVC. Along with many other unions, associative, social and environmental organizations, it called for peaceful demonstrations in March 2023 in Sainte-Soline (France) for the preservation and fair sharing of water. Tens of thousands of young people have mobilized for an equitable sharing of land and water. They show a keen sense of responsibility in the face of social inequalities and the destruction of ecosystems. In Sainte-Soline, indiscriminate firing of more than 5,000 grenades at demonstrators took place for two hours, causing many serious injuries. UN experts and observers from the French League for Human Rights have denounced this repression.¹

Participation in the organization of these collective gatherings is the reason why 2 farmers (Nicolas Girod, former national spokesperson, and Benoît Jaunet, spokesperson for the Confédération Paysanne des Deux-Sèvres) were placed in police custody on June 28, 2023 because of their status as

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/press-releases/2023/06/france-must-respect-and-promote-right-peaceful-protest-un-experts> and <https://www.ldh-france.org/première-synthèse-observations-des-24-26-mars-2023-a-sainte-soline/>



union spokespersons, as well as other activists including Julien Le Guet, spokesperson for the citizen collective Bassines Non Merci.

The government's reaction to this mobilization calls into question fundamental rights such as freedom of thought, opinion and expression, freedom of association and the right to participate. This French government is currently trying by all means to block and intimidate the action of the various unions, collectives, movements and associations involved. These rights are flouted by the public authorities who refuse to open a peaceful and constructive dialogue to democratically redefine water management.

As a farmer union, we are very concerned about the development of infrastructure that diverts water for the benefit of the few and entrenches an inequitable sharing of water.² The management of the commons - water and land - is a colossal challenge for the future and for agriculture. The process of agro-industrialization locks farmers and territories into a devastating system. Faced with the climate crisis, it is our duty as trade unionists to defend peasants and to offer another path by changing the agricultural model.

We call on the European Union to intervene and demand an end to the repression and criminalization of social movements in France, as well as an end to the repression against trade union delegates, activists, human rights defenders and environmental defenders. Fundamental rights and freedom of expression and demonstration must be respected by the French government.

We ask the European Union to offer its mediation to restore social dialogue in France and put an end to human rights violations.

The European Union must also initiate work on the preservation and fair distribution of rights to use the common good that water represents, while allowing a transition to a more sustainable agricultural model that protects this resource.

² <https://fondationdaniellemiterrand.org/nous-sommes-leau-qui-se-defend/>