CSM Key points on the Food Systems Summit (CFS AG-Bureau meeting 23 Nov 2020)

As CSM, we have been closely observing the process of Summit preparation since July 2019 and have expressed our concerns about its course on multiple occasions at the CFS in 2019 and 2020. In view of the multiplicity of problems identified, and seriously concerned about the course of the process, the CSM Coordination Committee, based on consultations with the Working Groups and Constituencies involved, decided to take the initiative towards an independent process of civil society and Indigenous Peoples. This was embodied in the Open Call, agreed upon by consensus in the CSM Coordination Committee, and presented in October during the 10th anniversary of the Mechanism and later at the CFS Special Event.

The course of the Summit continues to march in a problematic direction:

1. From the outset the Summit process has opened the doors for undue influence from the corporate sector, especially the World Economic Forum, in line with the strategic cooperation agreement between the UN Secretariat and the Davos Forum. This extremely worrying trend continues to be reflected in many dimensions, including by the enormous presence of representatives of this particular perspective in all the Summit bodies. This, by itself, sets a dangerous precedent and is neither acceptable nor legitimate.

2. Not surprisingly, then, the human rights approach remains extremely weak throughout the preparatory process so far. Especially the centrality of the main actors, the rights-holders, has been continuously denied: pastoralists, peasants, indigenous peoples, women, youth, workers, fisherfolk, consumers, landless people and people affected by food insecurity in the cities, and their own international organizations and platforms have been marginalized from the beginning.

3. The predominance of the corporate sector at all levels of the Summit means that the central proposals of the Summit (for example in the lines of action, in the scientific committee, in the dialogues) revolve almost exclusively around the corporate agenda for the transformation of food systems. From our point of view, these are false solutions to face the multiple crises exacerbated by the pandemic. It is imperative to consider the proposals and actions offered by the vision of food sovereignty, as well as to direct actions to strengthen the public sector and community institutions that make up the food systems. Similarly, it is urgent that States effectively regulate, in particular, transnational corporations and global financial capital in order to protect the public good, human rights and the regeneration of ecosystems.

4. The strong threat that a deliberate multi-stakeholder approach poses to the UN system should not be underestimated. When all actors are treated the same, regardless of their different roles and responsibilities, enormous asymmetries in power and resources, and strong conflicts of interest. The attempt to replace processes of inclusive multilateralism, as established in CFS, with a multi-stakeholder model with supposedly equal responsibility, firstly weakens the role of the member states themselves; secondly facilitates an undue influence of corporate interests, a trend of corporate capture in the UN; and finally makes a clear definition of effective accountability systems impossible.

In addition, we consider it necessary to respect the principles of autonomy and self-organization of our civil society and Indigenous Peoples' platforms, created and consolidated for more than 25 years, as part of an attitude of respect.

The attempts of co-optation have been multiple and worrying, both for organizations and constituencies (especially youth), as well as of our language that we have developed in our struggles, communities and territories over decades.

Based on this process of deliberation, these criteria and analysis, we will continue monitoring the FSS process. We consider that the new proposals made in these days do not have the potential to significantly change the course of the Summit, in terms of undue corporate influence, the human rights approach, the strengthening of public institutions , accountability, and a different relationship with civil society and Indigenous Peoples.

We have already said with the Open Call that the independent process is a reality, and we are not simply claiming our inclusion in a process that is going in the wrong direction.