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for relations with the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS)
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Ambassador Pio Wennubst
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN Agencies in Rome
Rapporteur of the CFS Policy process on *Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems*

5 October 2021

Dear Rapporteur Pio Wennubst,

It is with much anticipation and excitement as well as a sense of deep responsibility that we – the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM) Youth Working Group – write to you today. We are delighted at your appointment as Rapporteur of the *Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems* Working Group. We are writing this letter today to begin a conversation, and what we hope will be a productive and rewarding working relationship.

First, let us introduce ourselves. As noted above, we are the CSM Youth Working Group. The Youth Working Group convenes a diverse collection of Youth from around the globe. We include smallholders and family farmers, indigenous peoples, fisherfolks, agricultural and food workers, women, landless, consumers, pastoralists and urban food insecure – as well as students, academics, NGO staff and others. Youth have a plurality of understandings, experiences, knowledges and expectations about the future, but together the members of our Working Group have common concerns and a common vision of food systems grounded in human rights and the right of peoples to determine their own food and agricultural systems. In fall of 2020, we collectively prepared a declaration containing our youth demands for a radical transformation of food systems, which outlines many of our common concerns and visions. You can access it [here](#). It is these common concerns and visions – and these shared demands for radical transformations – that will guide our contributions in the upcoming CFS policy process on youth.

Second, an invitation. As you may already know, we are hosting a side-event as a part of the CFS's 49th Plenary. The event is entitled: *Food for Our Future: Youth Leading Radical Transformations Toward Economies of Well-being*. It is scheduled for 12:45 to 14:15 Rome Time on Monday, October 11th. The event will feature a panel of youth discussing the key themes of the HLPE's report: recognition, agency, equity and rights. We would like to formally invite you to participate in the panel and more specifically to offer reflections on and a response to the presentations. It would truly be an honour to have you on the panel, and to hear you share your reflections on the importance of youth to the future of agriculture and food systems, and the necessary changes we must begin to take to achieve the food systems that will form the basis of our – the youth's – future.

Third, some reflections on ensuring meaningful youth participation the upcoming policy process. The HLPE's report highlights the importance of including youth in policy processes, particularly those concerning youth. We couldn't agree more with this conclusion and the HLPE's corresponding recommendations on promoting and facilitating youth engagement and leadership in policy making. Youth participation, however, is not only an issue to be included in the CFS's policy recommendations. It is also a key issue that should guide the very process of elaborating the instrument itself. Indeed, elevating youth voices and engaging youth leadership in the policy process is absolutely central not only to achieving the best possible policy document, but to ensuring its very legitimacy and future impact.

In order to facilitate youth participation in the policy process, we thought we would proactively start a conversation on modalities of inclusion. Here are some reflections, recommendations and thoughts we have:

- **Language Rights:** Ensuring participation and inclusion, requires ensuring language justice. While we understand we cannot go beyond the already limited and exclusionary six official languages of the UN, we can take other proactive steps as a working group to ensure language justice:
 - *Communications from the Working Group:* In the past, CFS open-ended working groups have only communicated in English. We call on the CFS Working Group to send its communications in all official UN languages.
 - *HLPE Report Translation:* As of right now, the HLPE Report on Youth is only available in English. The report must be promptly translated into all CFS official languages to ensure that all participants in the policy process have the ability to read and analyze this important and foundational report.
 - *Interpretation during the Negotiations, including in Friends of the Rapporteur Sessions:* In the past, CFS negotiations have only provided interpretation during the official sessions of the working group. This has meant that when negotiations extend beyond the scheduled hours (which they often do) and during the Friends of the Rapporteur sessions, those who are not fluent in English are effectively barred from participation in the policy process, unless the CSM takes over interpretation for its participants with its own means. The upcoming policy process should ensure interpretation also for the informal parts of the negotiations.
 - *Text Language During the Negotiations:* In the past, draft 0 or draft 1 for CFS negotiations were provided in all UN languages, while the intermediate versions were not. More recently this has not been the case. As a result, the text used for the negotiation (the text for which we propose inputs and seek consensus) has only been available in English, effectively precluding non-English speakers from really engaging in the negotiations. It will be important to develop a new modality for the upcoming process, one that does not exclude so many.

- **Modalities and Logistics of the Negotiations:** We are living in a challenging time – multiple crises are affecting our constituencies and communities around the globe. These crises pose challenges for us in coordinating an inclusive and fair policy negotiation process, but they are not insurmountable. Here are some thoughts and recommendations:
 - *Virtual, in-person or hybrid:* We have different concerns depending on the format the negotiations take.
 - *Virtual:* If the negotiations are virtual, it will be important to support state delegates as well as youth who have connectivity challenges. Access to highspeed internet is a necessity for participation, but it is not available to all. It would be good to proactively think about how to support the engagement of those without access to this important tool. Further, if the negotiations are online, we must address the issue of multiple time zones. In order to ensure participation from all regions, it will be important to have a varied schedule that allows opportunity for anyone regardless of time zone to participate.



- *In-person:* If the negotiations proceed in person, we are very concerned that the vaccine apartheid will effectively preclude many of our constituency members from participating.
- *Hybrid:* If the negotiations process in a hybrid format, we are very concerned that those attending in person (which for the reasons stated above will not be everyone) will be advantaged in the negotiation process.
- *Length of Negotiation:* Currently the negotiation is only scheduled for only six days. This is simply not sufficient given the content to be covered and the importance of the policy process and instrument. More days must be booked and announced in advance, providing participants ample time to coordinate and plan for their attendance.

We call on this Working Group, under your leadership, to collectively make steps to ensure meaningful youth participation.

Finally, a meeting proposal. We have addressed several topics in this letter, and now, of course, we are curious to hear your thoughts and responses, and continue our conversation. We would thus be extremely grateful for an opportunity to arrange a call with you for an introductory meeting. In this meeting, we would propose to discuss our raised procedural equity issues, as well as our shared visions and concerns for the future of our food systems. Is there a time, ideally in the early afternoon Rome time (this ensures the greatest number of our colleagues can participate) when you would be available to a meet in the week following the CFS Plenary?

Thank you for reading our letter and contemplating our concerns. We look forward to working with you in this important CFS policy process, and to hopefully welcoming you on the panel of our side-event on Monday, October 11th.

Sincerely and respectfully,

the CSM Youth Working Group