

Thank you Mr Chair,

Good morning to everyone. I am Esther Penunia, from the Asian Farmers Association, in behalf of the Civil Society organizations or CSOs present here.

We, representatives of small farmers, landless, rural women, fishers, agricultural workers, pastoralists and herders, indigenous peoples, consumers, youth and NGOs coming from 17 countries met last weekend. We would like to share with you our assessment of the state of food and agriculture in the region.

While we have halved hunger and malnutrition in the region we are still faced with issues of poverty, hunger and malnutrition, and on the other extreme, extreme wealth, overconsumption and obesity. Ironically, farmers and rural communities, who are producing our food, are the ones who suffer from hunger and malnutrition. Corporations and big supermarkets have taken over our food and agriculture systems.

This monopolistic and commercialized food and agriculture system has led to the loss of agricultural biodiversity. There is urgent need to diversify agro-ecosystems in order to have more diverse nutrient outputs, but this call has fallen on deaf ears as it runs counter to the Green Revolution approaches dominating the policy directions in this region.

We have a broken food and agriculture system. From Mongolia to Australia, we are losing control of international and domestic markets. We suffer from low prices. Our lands, waters, forests and seeds are taken away by corporations and local elites.

The international rules governing our food and agriculture system are also broken. The demands of developing countries for immediate implementation of a special safeguard mechanism to counter import surges have been consistently ignored. With the opening up of our markets, especially with the threat of the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership), local farmers will not be able to compete with imports. Public stockpiling and social protection for farmers have also been sidelined.

It is no wonder that the younger generation turns away from farming and fishing. We thus have an ageing population of producers.

We need a new food and agriculture system that brings resilience to our farms and farmers and help us achieve the SDG of eliminating hunger and poverty by 2030. We need a reboot of our system, towards one that is responsive to the impacts of climate change. We thus call FAO and member states to fully implement agrarian and aquatic reform and change course to agroecology. Agroecology is the best pathway to achieve the goal of more sustainable food systems. It is productive, climate resilient, environmentally and health-friendly, provides decent employment and secure livelihoods, and can directly deliver diverse, nutrient rich foods. Thank you for your attention.

