

## Food systems Summit



*The transformation of food systems is a responsibility, not an action of choice. We need change and we will only do so by coming together and helping be that change.<sup>1</sup>*

For over a decade, farmers, fishers, pastoralists, and food workers have been demanding a food system transformation rooted in food sovereignty and agroecology. This vision is based on redesigning, re-diversifying, and re-localizing farming systems.<sup>2</sup> With this in mind, in October 2019, the UN Secretary General António Guterres convened the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS). This summit, which will be held towards the end of September<sup>3</sup>, aims to bring together states, UN entities, civil society and businesses to develop ideas on how to transform global food systems. The growing awareness of the links between climate change and agro-industrial food systems, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, which revealed existing vulnerabilities in global value chains, have reinforced the need for profound change<sup>4</sup> This is a great opportunity to give the food systems issue the importance it deserves.

Nevertheless, international civil society and other actors are concerned about the way the summit is being organized and the risks it poses to the future global governance of food security. Three UN rights experts<sup>5</sup> raised their concerns and warned that it will fail to be a 'people's summit' unless it is urgently rethought.<sup>6</sup>

First, the Summit initially bypassed the bodies already doing the very hard work of governing global food systems. The UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) already has the structure that the Summit organizers have been hastily reconstructing: a space for discussing the future of food systems, a comprehensive commitment to the right to food, mechanisms for involving civil society and the private sector on their own terms, and a panel of experts regularly providing cutting-edge reports. In other words, everyone is already at the table. The Summit has flagrantly – and perhaps deliberately – shifted governments' attention away from the CFS.

Second, the Summit's rules of engagement were determined by a small set of actors. The private sector, organizations serving the private sector (notably the World Economic Forum), scientists, and economists initiated the process. The table was set with their perspectives, knowledge, interests and biases. Investors and entrepreneurs working in partnership with scientists framed the agenda, and governments and civil society actors were invited to work within those parameters. Inevitably, that has meant a focus on what the small group saw as scalable, investment-friendly, 'game-changing' solutions. Reading

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<sup>1</sup> <https://actions4food.org/en/author/shealythow/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ipsnews.net/2021/03/un-food-systems-summit-not-respond-urgency-reform/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unfoodsystems.org/registration/index.php>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.coalitioncontrelafaim.be/ccf/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CCF-PositionPaper-UNFSS-FR\\_210601\\_web.pdf](https://www.coalitioncontrelafaim.be/ccf/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CCF-PositionPaper-UNFSS-FR_210601_web.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> **Michael Fakhri** is the current UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

**Hilal Elver** served as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food from 2014-2020.

**Olivier De Schutter** served as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food from 2008-2014, and is the current UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, and co-chair of IPES-Food.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ipsnews.net/2021/03/un-food-systems-summit-not-respond-urgency-reform/>

between the lines, this means AI-controlled farming systems (Artificial Intelligence), gene editing, and other high-tech solutions geared towards large-scale agriculture.

As a result, the ideas that should have been the starting point for a 'people's summit' have effectively been shut out. Genuine summit would challenge the industrial food system's impact on food, health, climate and biodiversity and have, at its very core and foundation, the interests and meaningful participation of the peasants, smallholders, pastoralists, fishers, Indigenous peoples and urban gardeners that feed the overwhelming majority of the planet's population.<sup>7</sup> For that Summit to really the Sustainable Development Goal 2, which aims to "*Eradicate hunger, food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*", it has to address the following recommendations:

- The right to food must be central to all aspects of the Summit, with attention on holding those with power accountable;
- Agroecology should be recognized as a paradigm (if not the paradigm) for transforming food systems, alongside actionable recommendations to support agroecological transition;
- The CFS should be designated as the home of the Summit outcomes, and the place where it is discussed and implemented, using its inclusive participation mechanisms.

Odile Ntakirutimana

<http://aefjn.org/en/home/>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.etcgroup.org/content/hijacking-food-systems-technofix-takeover-fss>