

# **The Kingdom of Cambodia**

**Nation, Religion and King**



Phnom Penh, August 5, 2021

## **OPEN LETTER**

**We are farmers, affected land communities, fisherfolks, workers, informal workers, indigenous people, trade unions, and civil society organizations**

**TO**

**Representative of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Cambodia**

**Subject:** Request for the National Summit and the UN Global Summit on Food System to address the needs and provide solutions to concerns and problems faced by farmers, affected land communities, fisherfolks, workers, informal workers, indigenous people, trade unions, and civil society organizations.

In the September 2021, the United Nation will held a Global Summit on Food System with the aim at enhancing food and agriculture to accelerate the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They aim to "transform the food system" towards a "healthy, sustainable and live in harmonize food diet" and protect our planet.

However, it turns out that the concept and process of the UN Summit is actually a further promotion and dissemination of the agenda driven by the World Economic Forum and its pro-government corporate partner's base on the neoliberalism economic system that negatively affect the decision-making processes of farmers, affected land community, fisherfolks, workers, informal workers and indigenous people. This new model is a process of altering the food system allowing corporations to gain profits and economic power. Such scenarios impact on our rights, our climate and our future everywhere.

We would like to express our grave concerns regarding the possible hunger that will spread faster and more severe the Covid-19 pandemic. Through an estimation demonstrates that it may impact on life than epidemics. In fact, the number of people experiencing severe hunger will double by

2020. They go to bed without food more and more. The global food crisis has never occurred and peaked in the last half century.

As a matter of fact, the current hunger crisis is a result of a fragile profit-oriented food and agriculture system. Domestic and international trade on agriculture and food is one of the driving forces behind land grabbing and the excessive exploitation of natural resources. Decades of implementation of neoliberalism frameworks in this sector has created a huge gap between the rich and poor and between wealthy and least developed countries. Notably, this has led to increased poverty among food producers in the Global South. While the world is experiencing record-breaking agricultural harvests of major crops, increased transportation and distribution of food, and food abundance, hunger has been on the rise for several years in a row.

In Cambodia, some specific incident of hunger including political instability that contributed to the depletion of natural resources; malnutrition rate of approximately 15%, equivalent to more than 2 million people; and approximately 79% of the rural population rely on agriculture, fishery and forest for their livelihoods. Their food system has been frequently threatened and destroyed. It is estimated that approximately 1.6 million rural farming households have experienced seasonal rice shortages; and approximately 30% of their spending comes from rice sale. In addition, around 40% of Cambodian children suffer from malnutrition and chronic stunting<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, about 40% of the 98 smallholder farmers in seven provinces, including Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Sihanoukville, Tbong Khmum, Kratie and Preah Vihear, were indebted to banks and microfinance due to demand for agricultural production, and they were struggling to repay their debts during the Covid-19. Farmers grow rice, raising livestock, and plant other crops depend entirely on rainfall and nature due to the lack of irrigation systems, especially in the dry season. Climate change (droughts and floods) and the changing seasons of the rainy season are major obstacles for farmers. These issues have destroyed agriculture products, making smallholder and indigenous farmers unable to respond to natural disasters and adapt to climate change, while social responsibility from state authorities remains weak. Most of the vegetables, fish, and meat are sold abroad, and most of the local food supplies are imported from abroad with no clear source or health impact monitoring. Food shortages cause most farmers to migrate to sell their labor and save money on food and other household necessities. Farmers' agricultural land is unsafe and easily lost due to the continued abuses of the powerful peoples and the development projects of

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<sup>1</sup> Emma Benson, 5 facts about hunger in Cambodia, June 30, 2020

corporations, agro-industries, mining and land acquisition for the development of infrastructure by state authorities<sup>2</sup>.

The above reasons clearly illustrate that the current food system is unjust, inequitable, unhealthy and unsustainable due to monopolies in the country, the region, and the world. The agricultural production and trade has led to decades of land grabbing and environmental destroying. This is supported by treaties and agreements under the World Trade Organization and other international companies. Big locusts control land and trade in agriculture, while small-scale food producers, fisher folks, workers, self-employees, indigenous peoples, and rural people have increased spending and plunged into debt crises and starvation.

Last but not least, peasants' rights to land tenure and resources use, peasants' rights to development and self-determination remain absent and not appear in summit documents. If the needs of smallholder farmers, fisher folk, workers, self-employees, and indigenous peoples are excluded in the process of national dialogue, we will not be able to achieve just, equitable, healthy and sustainable food system.

Therefore, the restoration of a just, equitable, healthy and sustainable food system needs to be radically changed to serve the needs and aspirations of the people and to respond to climate change. We would like to put forward to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Cambodia, who are leading and attending in the upcoming UN Food Summit with some of the following solutions:

**To the UN Global Summit on Food System:**

1. Reject any forms of corporate's interference or influence on the Global Summit on the Food System in September 2021
2. Put an end to corporate's control over agriculture and food systems through termination of the partnership between the UN Global Summit on Food System and the World Economic Forum.
3. Promote food sovereignty for farmers, fisherfolks, workers, informal workers, and indigenous peoples, instead of providing opportunities for corporations.

**To the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Cambodia:**

1. Rehabilitate and build appropriate small and medium irrigation systems that do not affect the natural environment. This is very necessary and urgent to address the issue of water

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<sup>2</sup> Between 20-23 August 2021, a research report was developed based on interviews with farmers regarding food system in Cambodia.

shortage in local communities to allow farmers to cultivate their crops, produce food and develop communities in a sustainable manner.

2. Although Cambodia has opened its economic door through trade liberalization, proper quality control must be ensured through transparent mechanism to prevent the import of substandard harmful food products and those without nutrition benefits. Efforts should be made to strengthen capacity of farmers and enabling environment should be provided for farmers to be able to produce and have access to quality food with high nutritious. Supports should be provided to strengthen and prioritize local agricultural production and markets to serve the needs of local communities first.
3. Reduce support for large agro-industrial corporations that perpetuate a mono-crop culture as this will not serve the food and nutrition aspects for the people; and it is also very destructive for the natural environment, water resources and seriously deplete the natural forest cover. It is also very important to expand and promote traditional seed conservation as well as to encourage the exchange of traditional seeds and knowledge between communities.
4. Promote the respect of rights of smallholder farmers, fisherfolks, workers, informal workers and indigenous peoples who are our main food producers by strengthening of appropriate agricultural production technologies, sustainable agriculture free from chemical fertilizers and pesticides and conservative agriculture (agroecology) that will ensures protection of natural resources and the natural environment, as well as strengthening a just, equitable, healthy and sustainable food system for Cambodian society as a whole.

We are looking forward to cooperating and providing you with further detailed information in relation to the content of our letter. For further information, please contact the organizing team below:

1. Peuk Sophorn, Executive Director of PKH, 015 638 171
2. Keo Chanra, Secretariat of PCFS Asia, 077 553 211
3. Tim Malay, Secretariat of SH, 017 990 689
4. Ull Vann, President of CYN, 093 913 011

Below is the list of supporting organizations:

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|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Charity Event Cambodia         | (CEC)        |
| 2. Friend for Reading Club        | (FRC)        |
| 3. Forest Communities Network     | Preah Vihear |
| 4. Indigenous Communities Network | Preah Vihear |
| 5. Mlou Prey Network (Sugarcane)  | Preah Vihear |

6. Youths and Societies Network	Preah Vihear
7. Communities Network for Actions	Preah Vihear
8. Prey Preah Roka Communities Network	Preah Vihear
9. Good Agriculture Cooperation Communities Network	Preah Vihear
10. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights	(CENTRAL)
11. People Center for Development and Peace	(PDP-CENTER)
12. Cambodian Center for Human Rights	(CCHR)
13. Prek Takong 60m	Phnom Penh
14. 92 Community	Phnom Penh
15. Chamroeun Community	Phnom Penh
16. Smor San Community	Phnom Penh
17. Russey Srah	Phnom Penh
18. Steung Kombat Community	Phnom Penh
19. Phum 23 Community	Phnom Penh
20. Phlov Rothpleung Community	Phnom Penh
21. Toul Sangke A Community	Phnom Penh
22. Andong Trabek Land Community	Svay Rieng
23. Samaki Romeas Haek Community	Svay Rieng
24. Chey Community	Svay Rieng
25. Samaki Chek Meas Community	Svay Rieng
26. Am Leang Community	Kampong Speu
27. Trapeang Chour Community	Kampong Speu
28. Reaksmei Sameakki Community	Kampong Speu
29. Cham Bak Trang Community	Kampong Speu
30. Dak Por Community	Kampong Speu
31. Peam Ros Community	Kampong Speu
32. 197 Land Community	Koh Kong
33. 766 Poverty Community	Koh Kong
34. 175 Land Community	Koh Kong
35. 129 Land Community	Koh Kong
36. 143 Land Community	Koh Kong
37. Ta Noun Land Community	Koh Kong
38. Areng Indigenous Community	Koh Kong
39. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community	Koh Kong
40. Chi Kha Leu Land Community	Koh Kong
41. Kleang Toek 78 Community	Siem Reap
42. Phnom Krom Community	Siem Reap
43. Land Community	Pailin
44. Ou Vor Preng Community	Battambang
45. Prey Peay Fishery Community	Kampot
46. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community	Kampong Chhnang
47. Lor Peang Community	Kampong Chhnang
48. Sre Prang Community	Tboung Khmum
49. Choam Kravien Community	Tboung Khmum
50. Thmar Da Community	Pursat
51. Okak Forest Community	Kratie

52. Veal Kanseng Forest Community	Kratie
53. Phnom Ses Forest Community	Kratie
54. Phnom Bak Forest Community	Kratie
55. Charay Indigenous Community	Ratanakiri
56. Community to Protect Nature	Pursat
57. Cambodian Youth Network Association	(CYN)
58. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community	(CCFC)
59. Cambodia's Independent Civil Servants Association	(CICA)
60. People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty	(PCFS)
61. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association	(IDEA)
62. Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation	(CFSWF)
63. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association	(ADHOC)
64. Federation of Independent Trade Unions	(INTUFE)
65. Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer employees of Nagaworld	(LRSU)
66. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions	(CATU)
67. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation	(CTWUF)
68. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia	(BWTUC)
69. Cambodian Informal Economic Workers Association	(CIWA)
70. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights	(LICADHO)
71. The coalition of Cambodian Fishers	(CCF)
72. The CamNature	
73. Cambodian Institute for Democracy	(CID)
74. Equitable Cambodia	(EC)
75. Sakmakum Teang Tnaut	(STT)
76. Ponlok Khmer Organization	(PKH)
77. Ponleu Ney Kdey Sangkhum Organization	(PNKS)
78. Non-timber forest products Organization	(NTFP)
79. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia	(COMFREL)
80. Youth Resource Development Program	(YRDP)
81. The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability	(ANSA) Cambodia
82. Peace Building Organizations	(PBO)
83. Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability	(CISA)
84. Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition	(CHRAC)
85. Cambodian Volunteers for Society	(CVS)
86. Fisheries Action Coalition Team	(FACT)
87. Alliance for Conflict Transformation	(ACT)

#### Individual Supporters:

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|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Ms. Chhim Channeang | Coordination of NGO-CEDAW |
| 2. Mr. Puth Kulka      | Social Activists          |