

UNITED STATES OPENING STATEMENT AT THE WORKING GROUP ON
THE DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF PEASANTS AND OTHER
PEOPLE WORKING IN RURAL AREAS

Monday, May 16, 2016

Thank you, [...] ^{The US} welcomes this opportunity to explain our position regarding the draft Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas circulated in advance of this Working Group session. /

The United States is deeply concerned about the challenges faced by persons living and working in rural areas around the world, and we participate in existing discussions in multilateral fora to address these complex issues. However, we retain our previously stated reservations regarding this draft Declaration.

While the United States takes very seriously many of the issues covered in this draft Declaration, we continue to believe the Human Rights Council and its subsidiary bodies are not the right forum for discussion of many of these issues. Instead, we believe that these issues would be better considered by other existing UN mechanisms and outlets with specific mandates relating to them.

The United States underscores that human rights are universal rights held and enjoyed by all individuals, regardless of their societal classification or nature of their work. The draft Declaration inappropriately singles out a group – peasants and other people working in rural areas – for special treatment with respect to ^{the} rights perspective. While the United States is concerned as a matter of policy about challenges confronting members of these groups, and undertakes numerous initiatives to improve the circumstances of people working in rural areas, we do not agree with the suggestion that these categories of individuals merit different treatment in the international human rights canon. The draft also purports to enumerate new rights for this group, including collective rights. This effort to create human rights for groups instead of for individuals is inconsistent with international human rights law. Further, many of the proposed new rights have no precedent. For instance, there is no internationally accepted definition of the “right to seeds.”

People who live and work in rural areas are key to local, regional, and global food security. However, while we recognize the importance of discussing the

challenges faced by persons living and working in rural areas and seek ways to protect their existing human rights, we will continue to oppose adoption of the draft Declaration. Instead, we believe our efforts should be devoted to identifying challenges to the promotion and protection of internationally accepted human rights for those in rural areas, and to finding practical solutions to those challenges.

Thank you.