



OUR LAND IS OUR LIFE DECLARATION

AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND FAITH LEADERS CALL FOR URGENT ACTION AT THE AFRICAN – EUROPEAN UNION FOREIGN MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

African civil society and faith leaders of the Our Land is Our Life Platform call on African and European Foreign Ministers to ensure African people's real needs and concerns are addressed in their Ministerial meeting of 26 October.

In advance of the AU EU Summit, the Kigali meeting brings together AU and EU foreign ministers to discuss issues of security, peace and governance; education, science & technology; migration and mobility; and sustainable transformation. The legacy of colonialism and the huge differentials of power and capacity between Europe and Africa have tended to see such discussions framed in a European rather than African context. Consequently, the issues that are most urgent for Africa tend to slip down or off the agenda. As an African led civil society and faith-based platform working for land justice and sustainable land use management, we see these topics through an African land users' lens.

We urge the AU and EU to sincerely engage with African civil society and faith communities to ensure meaningful community participation in the Africa EU partnership process.

Land governance is a key issue. The impunity of corporate and elite capture of African land and natural resources and the damage this is doing to Africa's food systems, to our environment, our soils, lands and water, our biodiversity, our nutrition and health, is a major concern. Land grabs push people off the land, fuelling conflicts and provoking displacement and subsequently migration in search of food and livelihoods. Women are often the first to suffer.

In 2021, over 25 million hectares land deals have been concluded in the African continent. Large-scale land acquisitions by private actors are encouraged and financially supported by governments and their public development banks. A complex web of financiers, including private equity funds and European Development Finance Institutions, finance the land acquisition projects.

We call for an end to the financing of large-scale land acquisition projects, corporate agribusiness operations, and speculative investments by public development banks.

The AU Draft Land Governance Strategy conceptualises *"land as a key factor of production for most economic activities; more especially that Africa is an agro-based economy."* This narrow economic lens obscures the much broader African land context. For most Africans, land is neither a tradeable commodity nor an individual possession; it is a gift from God and our ancestors, a common good.

We call on Ministers to strive to reach agreements that ensure the sustainable use of land for the hundreds of millions of Africans who rely on it, particularly women.

Security is also about families having enough food and providing a future for our children. Would our young people really risk their lives crossing to Europe if they could gain a decent living at home?

We call on Ministers to embrace the need for transformational change in agriculture and food production.

Green Revolution approaches to agriculture based on imported technologies and capital-intensive fertiliser and pesticide inputs have failed to raise productivity or reduce hunger and poverty, while degrading our soils, felling our forests, and wasting billions of public sector dollars. Importing subsidised European food surpluses is putting local producers out of business while creating more dependency. Agribusiness-food platforms and digital solutions are unlikely to benefit our small-scale farmers.

We call on governments to put agroecology on the policy table and recognise its track record of success in producing food with low input costs, with huge potential to create jobs for youth, provide healthy diets, and make farming communities more resilient to shocks.

Let us not forget the climate crisis that is already presenting major challenges to those living on and off the land, despite Africa having contributed so little to the problem. We need urgent support to enable our food producers to adapt to the challenges.

COVID-19 has shown the fragility of global food system supply chains, yet Africa has not changed course to become less dependent on outside sources. Hunger has increased, while the vaccine figures show how little Africa can count on others in time of need.

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The Our Land is Our Life platform draws inspiration from an Ethiopian proverb, “When spiders unite their webs, they tie a lion.” The proverb captures the spirit of the alliance of civil society and faith-based organisations who have come together in solidarity and fraternity to amplify the voices of African communities struggling for land justice and the transition to agroecology.

The Our Land is Our Life coordination group is composed of leaders of:

- Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)
- Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM)
- Convergence Globale des luttes pour la terre et l’eau en Afrique de l’ouest (CGLTE)
- Rural Women Assembly (RWA)
- Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN)
- Justiça Ambiental JA! - Friends of the Earth Mozambique
- Pan-African Institute for Citizenship, Consumers and Development (CICODEV)