

**UKRAINIANS REJECT THE FORCED “FREE SALE” OF THEIR LAND**  
**Open letter to the heads of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund,**  
**and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development**

**6 December, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine**

To: Suma Chakrabarti, President, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development  
David Malpass, President, World Bank Group  
Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director, International Monetary Fund

Dear Sir / Madam,

This letter is authored by participants of the Public Forum “Towards Peasants’ Right to Land in Ukraine - Through Responsible Management of Land Tenure and Land Use System” which took place in Kyiv on 26 November 2019. The forum hosted 62 participants as follows:

- Members of 10 public organizations and public unions that represent interests of about 40 thousand private farms and over 4 million peasants employed in agriculture,
- Farmers, members of farming households and peasant farms,
- Representatives of rural communities,
- Representatives of agrarian universities, research institutions and other organizations.

This letter intends to bring the following to your attention.

The processes of lifting the moratorium on sale of agricultural lands and implementation of an essentially unregulated land market are being quickly evolved in Ukraine with your encouragement and mediation. These processes trigger popular unrests and cause active public protests, including pickets, massive rallies, demonstrations and marches.

The public protests are brought about by the accent on the peasants’ right to sell their land plots, instead of the accent on the peasants’ land ownership as the means to provide decent existence for themselves and their families. The prospective sale of agricultural lands will result in their further concentration in the hands of the so-called “efficient owners” – Ukrainian agricultural oligarchs and transnational corporations. The farmers’ and peasants’ access to buying land will be blocked because of their poor financial capacity. Such avowed promotion of large-scale agricultural business in Ukraine contradicts recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change / IPCC (2019). The IPCC emphasized that industrialized agriculture and large-scale monoproduction play a key role in climate change; therefore, there is an acute need for global action to move from industrial methods of food production to agroecological methods that will also support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ukrainian authorities and your counselors claim that opening the land market will be beneficial for new investments and economic growth. However, if this does happen, the only beneficiaries will be new landowners, not Ukrainian farmers. Peasants who sell their land plots to solve their pressing financial problems may soon join other marginal social groups that badly require substantial permanent assistance on behalf of the state. Such assistance will become a heavy burden for the state budget and tax-payers. Ukrainians will also have to face the drastic aftermaths of the alleged economic “growth”: failing health, deterioration of land and degradation of ecology, decline in rural employment, progressive social differentiation, escalation of social conflicts and protests, impossibility for future generations to own and cultivate their land, and destruction of the social foundations of Ukrainian national culture.

Naturally, the assistance of international financial organizations is granted under certain conditions. At present, Ukraine survives economic hardships and needs an external support. Meanwhile, providing it under the condition of selling agricultural lands, the amount of which is the largest in Europe, looks like extortion. Those who aim to help Ukraine should not be guided by the interests of large-scale transnational companies and global investment banks, but by the international documents approved by the world community; among them are: the Action Plan of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019-2028), the HLPE Report “Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems that Enhance Food Security and Nutrition” (2019), Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (2012), United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (2018), and other UN documents adopted within the framework of sustainable development.

The first steps to be taken should be the following ones: i) immediate cessation of adopting the amendments to the land legislation on the “free sale” of agricultural lands, state-owned lands in particular; (ii) support of Ukraine in creation of the Ministry of Rural Development, in designing and implementation of the development strategy oriented at environmental protection, domestic food security, farmers’ and rural communities’ support that enhances their capacity to achieve the objectives outlined in the above UN

documents; (iii) revision of all the international programs in Ukraine, including the World Bank Program "Accelerating Private Investments in Agriculture" (2019). According to the Program, small and medium agricultural producers are defined, for the Program's purpose, as agricultural enterprises that operate on up to 1,000 Ha of land, which goes against Ukrainian reality. In Ukraine, about 80% of private farms possess no more than 100 hectares, and farming households typically possess 2-10 hectares, with over 70% of such households cultivating not more than 5 hectares. Private farms and farming households, which provide more than 40% of the total agricultural product, are left beyond the international assistance programs.

We still have time to release the Ukrainian society's tension triggered by an accelerated implementation of the "free" market of agricultural lands, and to prevent a violent confrontation, the consequences of which in the contemporary context can be severely destructive. Your positive response to this letter could bear witness to your authority in complying with the above UN documents that support the Sustainable Development Goals, the articles 27.1 and 27.2 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas in particular.

Respectfully,  
on behalf of the forum participants,

Heard of the Organizing Committee:

**Olena Borodina,**

Doctor of Economics, Professor,  
Associate Member of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine,  
Head of the coordination council, "Ukrainian Rural Development Network" public organization,  
member of the coordination council, Civil Society Mechanism  
for relations with the UN Committee on the World Food Security

Members of the Organizing Committee:

**Mykola Stryzhak,**

President, Association of Ukrainian farmers and private land-owners

**Valeriy Heyets,**

Doctor of Economics, Professor  
Member of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine,  
Honored Worker of Science and Technology of Ukraine

**Valeriy Zhuk,**

Doctor of Economics, Professor  
Member of the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences of Ukraine,  
Honored Worker of Science and Technology of Ukraine

**Andriy Grytsenko,**

Doctor of Economics, Professor,  
Associate Member of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine,  
Honored Educationalist of Ukraine

**Volodymyr Sidenko,**

Doctor of Economics, Professor,  
Associate Member of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine,

**Vasyl Shakun,**

Doctor of Law, Professor  
Member of the National Academy of Legal Sciences of Ukraine,  
Honored Worker of Science and Technology of Ukraine

**Ihor Prokopa,**

Doctor of Economics, Professor  
Associate Member of the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences of Ukraine,

**Lyubov Moldavan,**

Doctor of Economics, Professor,  
Honored Economist of Ukraine

**Tamara Ostashko,**

Doctor of Economics, Professor,  
Associate Member of the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences of Ukraine,

**Olga Popova,**

Doctor of Economics, Professor

**Volodymyr Vasilyev,**

Head of the Ukrainian Association of Green Tourism