

Coalition Slams UN Food Summit for Peddling ‘Corporate-Led False Solutions’ to Hunger

"The U.N. has finally made it clear what 'multilateralism' is all about—paying lip service to the people while skewing priorities for the interests of imperialists and monopoly capitalists."

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Despite branding itself as a “people’s summit,” the 2021 [United Nations Food Systems gathering](#) prioritized the perspectives and interests of large corporations, shut out small producers, and peddled sham solutions to the intensifying global crises of hunger and climate change.

That’s the view of an international coalition of food sovereignty advocates, which on Saturday issued a statement blasting the U.N. Food Systems Summit (FSS) for “paving the way for greater control of big corporations over global food systems and misleading the people through corporate-led false solutions.”

“The U.N. FSS did not listen to the voices of marginalized rural peoples, nor forward real solutions to the food, biodiversity, and climate crises,” said Sylvia Mallari, global co-chairperson of the People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty. “Instead, it let powerful nations and big corporations play an even bigger role in determining food and agricultural policies.”

“The U.N. has finally made it clear what ‘multilateralism’ is all about—paying lip service to the people while skewing priorities for the interests of imperialists and monopoly capitalists,” Mallari added.

In the months leading up to the FSS—which took place during the U.N. General Assembly in New York last week—food justice campaigners [repeatedly warned](#) that the event had been “hijacked” by big businesses and wealthy private donors, including Nestlé and the Gates Foundation.

Following the event, advocates argued their warnings were justified, pointing specifically to a number of statements and pledges made during the FSS to spotlight its corporate-friendly

nature and exclusion of small food producers from its proposed solutions:

- [U.S. President Joe Biden said](#) that Washington would spend \$10 billion to “end hunger and invest in food systems at home and abroad,” half of which will go to the USAID’s Feed the Future initiative in various countries. This includes a “large-scale food fortification” program in partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). Through its co-founder Melinda Gates, the BMGF, which has been heavily criticized for its role in pushing for destructive Green Revolution technologies and seed privatization that favor big agribusinesses, also addressed the U.N. FSS and announced a [\\$922 million commitment](#) to food fortification. Biofortification promotes industrial monocultures over agroecological food diversity, and ushers in the next generation of genetically-modified crops, such as the Gates-funded Vitamin-A “Golden Rice” recently approved for commercial use in the Philippines.
- Additionally, the U.S. Feed the Future initiative [works with US businesses](#) such as Cargill, Pepsico, Corteva Agriscience, the Coca-Cola Company, Mars Inc, Unilever, John Deere, etc. to supposedly “fight global hunger.” In 2020, \$1.2 million Feed the Future funds to help “combat the economic toll of Covid-19” [went to “private sector partners”](#) in Africa—these include agrochemical, fruit export, and microfinance companies—instead of small farmers most affected by the pandemic.
- In his [speech to the UN FSS](#), World Bank president David Malpass cited increased financing for “climate-smart” agriculture. “Climate-smart” agriculture is the euphemism used by agrochemical and seed companies for proprietary technofixes such as GM crops. The U.S. and United Arab Emirates also advanced the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM for Climate), which aims to increase public and private investment in “climate-smart agriculture and food systems innovation” at the UNFSS, [with the BMGF expressing its support](#).
- World Bank’s Malpass also mentioned “moving away from policies that favor rice and other staples over fruit and vegetables,” which, for the Global South means intensified neoliberal policies that facilitate grabbing of farmers’ land planted with staple food in favor of export-oriented plantations.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) director general Qu Dongyu [talked about targeted interventions](#) for digital and “technologically advanced” innovations, and failed to mention support for agroecological approaches. For “accelerating the transformation of agri-food systems at country level,” the FAO will use its Hand-In-Hand Initiative—an “innovative business model” which creates “matchmaking” opportunities between partners and recipient countries in the Global South. Partners include the private sector, even the [agrochemical giant Syngenta](#).

Hardly a fringe assessment of the FSS, the food sovereignty coalition’s critique of the summit was echoed by Michael Fakhri, the U.N. special rapporteur on the right to food.

“The summit is being led by scientists and research institutes who are pro-corporate sector,” Fakhri said in an [interview](#) with *The Guardian*. “People say, let’s give them the benefit of the doubt, let’s see if it is the ‘people’s summit’ it is claiming to be. But they have failed in what they had set out to do. It is not the people’s summit. It is elitist.”

Fakhri added that while corporations may not have played a direct role “in the day-to-day

operations of the summit,” the “leadership picked comes from organizations that believe corporations are part of the solution.”

As *The Guardian* noted, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres’ “choice of Agnes Kalibata, the former Rwandan minister for agriculture, to lead the summit was met with protests last year, given her role as president of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (Agra), which has been accused of promoting damaging, business-focused practices.”

In an effort to counter the business-dominated U.N. event, thousands of rural farmers, civil society organizations, and food sovereignty advocates convened their own [Global People’s Summit \(GPS\) on Food Systems](#), which aimed to “expose and oppose the control of big corporations over food and agriculture the corporate capture of the U.N.”

At the close of the three-day GPS, which consisted of virtual events and on-the-ground protests, participants adopted a “[People’s Declaration](#)” that decried “a pandemic of systemic and perpetual hunger being perpetrated by big business through the globalized food economy—a system characterized by unsustainable monoculture production, environmental plunder, and waste; as well as wars and conflicts fueled by imperialist competition for resources, land, and markets.” Attendees also resolved to carry out “[People’s Action Plans](#)” devised at GPS workshops and public forums.

“We believe that an equitable food system can only be built on the people’s right to land and livelihoods, and to decent working and living conditions for all,” the declaration reads. “This means that food production must be decided by the sovereign will of the people, based on their particular circumstances, priorities, and needs. Profit motives of corporations—euphemistically called market forces—should not determine what food to produce, how to produce it, and for whom.”

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