

# **Take a stand!**

## **Water is a human right, not a commodity!**

**Call to the GFFA International Conference of Agriculture Ministers**



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Berlin, January 17, 2026

This is now the 16th consecutive year that we farmers and civil society organizations are coming to Berlin with our tractors and demands for the “Wir haben es satt” (“We are fed up”) protest and the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA). This year is marked by worrying signs: Unlike in previous years, you have not invited the world's largest farmers' movement, *La Via Campesina*, and its German member organization, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft* (AbL) to the GFFA Young Farmers' Forum. By doing so, you are excluding a key international farmers' representation from these discussions about the future of our food systems. This is a clear step backward in the implementation of international decisions on the participation of young farmers, in particular the CFS policy recommendations on strengthening youth participation (2022; Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition). Moreover, the German Ministry of Agriculture has denied us, as a civil society alliance, our own expert panel at the GFFA for the first time – and with it the opportunity to contribute with our critical, diverse, but always constructive voices to this year's theme, "Water. Harvests. Our Future." In times when democracies around the world are under enormous pressure, particularly due to a surge of rightwing actors, and budgets for social and development policy are being cut while military spending is rising sharply, these decisions send problematic signals. In addition, the current protests by farmers across the EU highlight the growing discontent with current agricultural policy.

In this situation, we are taking a clear stand here, in front of the doors of the GFFA. In the spirit of the declaration of the third Nyéléni Global Forum 2025, the most significant international gathering of social movements of the recent years to work on a joint political action agenda for the transformation of our food systems, we raise our voices here today and call on you, Minister of Agriculture Alois Rainer, and you, honorable international Ministers of Agriculture: Take a stand! Put an end to the rollback of human rights achievements and put the implementation of the right to food at the top of the political agenda. Act in line with previous GFFA final communiqés and make special efforts to involve marginalized and vulnerable groups in political decisions. Use the International Year of Women in Agriculture to strengthen particularly the rights of women, non-binary and transgender people in agriculture.

## **Protect water as a common good – act now!**

We welcome this year's GFFA focus on water. The challenges associated with water are already causing existential hardship for peasants and fishers in the North and South, as well as many others who earn their livelihoods from food production. They are facing a highly uncertain future. We must tackle the necessary changes now! We therefore call on you to implement the guidelines and decisions of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which were negotiated by the ministries present here, as well as the recommendations of the Special Rapporteurs on the human rights to food and water. In doing so, you can fulfil your obligations under international law and at the same time initiate the necessary transformation.

Courageous, inclusive political action is urgently needed. Because there are many problems. Whether in Germany, Kenya, Zambia, Brazil, India or the Philippines – extreme weather events are becoming more frequent all over the world due to climate change. Droughts and heavy rainfall lead to loss of soil fertility, crop failures and hunger. Industrial agriculture is both a contributor to and accelerator of these phenomena. It consumes almost three-quarters of all water resources and, through the discharge of chemical pollutants, is partly responsible for their contamination. Due to a lack of regulation – both globally and in Germany – powerful agricultural players are able to waste water largely unhampered, while farms and the broader population are frequently struggling with extreme shortages.

We are systematically draining parts of our landscape; the groundwater level is falling year by year. In Germany, we have lost as much water this way over the last 20 years as can fit into Lake Constance. This is a cause of great concern to us, as more than 70 percent of drinking water in this country is obtained from groundwater. In recent droughts, grassland in many places has turned into brown steppes. Livestock from pasture-based farming had to be slaughtered because there was not enough feed. Nevertheless, crop losses due to drought continues to be largely compensated by the same means that got us into this situation: increasing irrigation and the use of more agricultural chemicals so that the world market can be served.

Without the recognition and implementation of human right to food, to water and to a healthy environment, countless people will lose their livelihoods. In addition, the rights of nature must finally be established as binding within the framework of the United Nations as the agricultural industry's greed for land and water resources is insatiable. Today, one percent of landowners controls 70 percent of the world's land area – and with it the water resources therein, which they use to their advantage and at the expense of local and global water balances. All over the world, farmers are losing access to vital water sources – whether through land and water grabbing or through the lowering of the groundwater level as a result of massive irrigation. The widespread water-intensive cultivation of monocultures such as soybeans or eucalyptus trees in the Global South for the Global North is greatly exacerbating conflicts over local water resources.

Almost 4 million hectares of forest are cleared worldwide every year to make way for industrial agriculture, releasing several gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>. The water storage capacity of the soil is declining, and water cycles are severely disrupted, resulting in increasingly irregular rainfall. One example is the clearing of almost 100 hectares of forest in the Grünheide water protection area near Berlin a few years ago to make way for the Tesla Gigafactory. The region was already suffering from drought, and the sandy soil had little capacity to store water even in the past. Deforestation acts as an accelerant for these ecological crises. Nevertheless, plans to expand the site by another 100 hectares are progressing rapidly.

2026 is the UN Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists – an opportunity to highlight the rights of over half a billion people whose mobile livelihoods depend on access to grazing land and water. Land conversion, privatization and water theft are putting pastoralists under enormous pressure. Dams, irrigation projects and mining are depriving them of important pasture and water sources.

In the fisheries sector the lack of political inclusion leads to human rights violations, too. Industrial overfishing, huge aquaculture facilities and deep-sea mining are displacing fishers from their traditional areas. This reckless exploitation of the waters, with its destructive effects on biodiversity and ecosystems, increasingly means that traditional fishing communities are losing their access to water and thus their livelihoods. So-called nature conservation zones, which have been designated without local consultation, also threaten their access to water and their livelihoods.

In this context, we would also like to warn against the widely praised approaches of the blue bioeconomy with algae as biomass. Their implementation must be strictly aligned with the right to food, agroecological principles and planetary boundaries. Otherwise, there is a risk of large-scale projects that once again benefit only a few and disrupt the balance of nature – at the expense of the people who live from and with it.

Armed conflicts further exacerbate water stress in some regions. This now applies to almost the entire Sahel region, where many people are no longer able to irrigate their fields or water their livestock. The situation in Sudan is particularly dramatic. The situation in the Gaza Strip is also very threatening. Israeli military operations have destroyed water pipes, desalination plants and sewage treatment plants, resulting in an acute emergency in terms of water supply and disposal. The Israeli government continues to restrict the supply of clean drinking water and many goods needed for repairs and supplies to the area.

Water is the source of life. We urge you to do everything in your power to preserve this source and the access to it for all people. Honorable Ministers, please make water a top priority!

**Specifically, we call on you, honorable ministers of the GFFA, to:**

**Implement a human rights-based policy approach:**

Anchor the implementation of the right to adequate food and water as central goals of international and national agricultural and food policy in this year's **GFFA final communiqué** and in your political actions.

Strengthen the **CFS** – financially, but also in terms of content in policy negotiations on resilient food systems. Advocate for the anchoring of the right to food, water, a healthy environment, the rights of nature and agroecology in policy recommendations and participate at a high level in CFS 54.

Protect **communally used pasture and access to water!** Anchor the rights of pastoralists and fishers in international processes, secure common property and water rights, and make Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) binding.

**Strengthen international cooperation and coherence for equitable water policy:**

At the **ICARRD+20 conference** in February, advocate for the integration of land guidelines relevant to water policy, such as the UN Smallholder Declaration and the UN Indigenous Declaration (UNDROP and UNDRIP), into the final declaration of the states.

Advocate for the democratization of international water governance at the **UN Water Conference** in December. Promote a participatory mechanism modelled on the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) of the CFS.

**Specific recommendations for Germany:**

Advocate for a consistently high **GAP** budget for the **GAP** after 2027 and for these funds to be linked to farmers' performance – small-scale farming, pasture, diverse crop rotations and other measures for sustainable water management.

Implement the **water strategy**: promote the equitable distribution and sustainable use of water resources at national level through agricultural structural measures and usage regulations. Use subsidies to promote agroecological farming with integrated water resource management.

Set up support programs for reconnecting rivers with their floodplains and for the **renaturation** of wetlands and moors. These could not only provide high-quality water but also store carbon and mitigate the effects of extreme weather events.