

## African Peasant Congress for Food Security

Excellent conference wrap-up of sentiments from the October meeting of La Via Campesina (Africa's International Peasant Movement) - and a worthy warning and model for rural India. - Ed.

Open Letter from Maputo:

Food sovereignty now! La Via Campesina (2008-10-29)

The entire world is in crisis, a crisis with multiple dimensions. There is a food crisis, an energy crisis, a climate crisis and a financial crisis. The solutions put forth by Power & more free trade, more GMOs, etc. & purposefully ignore the fact that the crisis is a product of the capitalist system and of neoliberalism, and they will only worsen its impacts. To find real solutions, La Via Campesina in this open letter argues we need to look toward Food Sovereignty.

### HOW DID WE GET TO THIS STATE OF CRISIS?

In recent decades we have witnessed the advance of finance capital and transnational corporations (TNCs) across all aspects of agriculture and the global food system. From the privatization of seeds and the sale of pesticides, to buying the harvests, processing the food, transporting and distributing it, all the way to retail sale to consumers, everything is controlled by a handful of corporations. Food has gone from being a right of all people, to being just another commodity. Our diets are being homogenized, with food that is bad for you, is priced out of the reach of most people, and makes us lose the culinary traditions of our peoples.

At the same time we are witnessing an offensive of capital for the control of natural resources, the likes of which we have not seen since colonial times. The crisis of the rate of profit has led Capital to launch a privatizing war for the eviction of our peoples, peasants and the indigenous, the theft through privatization of our land, territories, forests, biodiversity, water and mineral resources. It is an aggression against both rural peoples and the environment. The planting of large-scale agrofuel monocultures is an aspect of this war of displacement. It is routinely justified with the false arguments that agrofuels are the solution to the energy and climate crisis. But the truth is that the current dependence on long distance transport of goods, and individual transport of people in automobiles instead of mass transportation, have more to do with these crises than anything else.

Now, with the food and financial crises, everything is getting worse. The food crisis and the financial crisis are linked through financial speculation on the prices of food crops and land, to the detriment of people. Now as the crisis grows, finance capital is more desperate every day, assaulting our government treasuries for their bailouts, which will only force more budget cutting in our countries, and make poverty and suffering even more widespread. Hunger is continuing to grow in our world. Exploitation and all forms of violence, especially directed at women, are on the rise. With the economic recession in rich countries, xenophobia is spreading, with more racism and repression, and the dominant economic model offers ever fewer options to our rural youth.

In synthesis, things are going from bad to worse. Nevertheless, we must recognize that like all crises, this one also generates opportunities. Opportunities for capitalism, which uses crises to reinvent itself and find new sources of profits, but also opportunities for social movements. Among the latter are the fact that the principal theses of neoliberalism are being stripped of their legitimacy in public opinion, and the fact the international financial institutions (World Bank, IMF, WTO) are proving to be incapable of administering the crisis (in addition being among the cause of the same crisis).

This creates the opportunity to eliminate them, and create new institutions to regulate the global economy that serve public interests. It is clearer every day that the TNCs are our real enemies behind these other enemies. It is clearer every day that the neoliberal governments do not serve the interests of their peoples. And it is clearer every day that the global corporate food regime is not capable of feeding the great majority of people on this planet, while Food Sovereignty based on peasant agriculture is more needed than ever. Facing this reality, what do we defend in La Via Campesina?

- Food Sovereignty: getting speculative finance capital out of our food system, and re-nationalizing food production and reserves offer us the only real way out of the food crisis. Only peasant and family farm agriculture feed people, while agribusiness grows export crops and agrofuels to feed cars instead of human beings. Food Sovereignty based on peasant and family farm agriculture offers us a way out of this crisis.

- As solutions to the energy and climates crises: the dissemination of local food systems, that are not based on long-distance transport nor on industrial agriculture, could eliminate as much as 40% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Industrial agriculture warms the planet, and peasant agriculture cools the planet. Changes in patterns of transportation for people and patterns of consumption are additional the steps needed to address the energy and climate crises.

- Genuine integral agrarian reform and the defense of the territories of indigenous peoples are essential steps to roll back the evictions and displacement in the countryside, and to use our farm land to grow food instead of exports and fuels.

- Sustainable peasant and family farm agriculture: only agroecological peasant and family farming can de-link food

prices from petroleum prices, recover degraded soils, and produce healthy local food for our peoples.

- The advance of women is an advance for all: the end of all forms of violence against women, including physical, social and other forms. Achieving true gender parity in all internal spaces and organs of debate and decision-making, are absolutely essential commitments to advance at this time as social movements toward the transformation of society.

- The right to seeds and water: seeds and water are sources of life, and are the heritage of our peoples. We cannot permit their privatization, nor the use of GMOs or of terminator technology.

- No to the criminalization of social protest, yes to the UN Declaration of Peasant Rights, proposed by La Via Campesina. It will be a key tool in the international legal system to strengthen our position and our rights as peasants and family farmers.

- Rural youth: We urgently need to open ever more spaces in our movement for the incorporation of the creativity and strength of our rural young people, in their struggle to create their future in the countryside.

- Finally, we are the women and men who produce and defend the food of all peoples.

All the participants in the V Conference of La Via Campesina commit ourselves to the defense of peasant and family farm agriculture, food sovereignty, dignity and life. We offer real solutions the global crisis we face today. We have the right to continue to exist as peasants and farmers, and we have the responsibility to feed our peoples.

We are here, the peasants and family farmers of the world, and we refuse to disappear.

Food sovereignty now! Unity and struggle of the people! Globalize struggle! Globalize hope! Source article:  
<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/letters/51604>