

Declaration of Maputo: V International Conference of La Via Campesina

Friday, 24 October 2008

Maputo, Mozambique, October 19-22, 2008
Food Sovereignty now! Unity and struggle of the people!(

We are men and women of the earth, we are those who produce food for the world. We have the right to continue being peasants and family farmers, and to shoulder the responsibility of continuing to feed our peoples. We care for seeds, which are life, and for us the act of producing food is an act of love. Humanity depends on us, and we refuse to disappear.

We, La Via Campesina, are a worldwide movement of rural women, peasants and family farmers, farm workers, indigenous peoples, rural youth and afro-descendants from Asia, Europe, America and Africa, gathered together in Maputo, Mozambique from October 19 to 22, 2008, for our V International Conference. We were received in a warm and fraternal fashion by our hosts, the National Union of Peasants (União Nacional de Camponeses/UNAC) of Mozambique. We met to reaffirm our determination to defend peasant and family farm agriculture, our cultures and our right to continue to exist as peoples with our own identity. We are more than 550 people, including more than 325 men and women delegates, from 57 countries, representing hundreds of millions of farming families. We women represent more than half of the people producing food in the world and here we celebrate with energy and determination our Third Worldwide Assembly of Women. We are also celebrating our Second Youth Assembly of La Via Campesina, since only with the decisive participation of youth can a present and a future for rural areas be guaranteed. In this V International Conference we also ratified 41 organizations as new members of La Via Campesina, and we have the participation of many organizations and allied movements from all over the world, in our First Assembly with the Allies of Via Campesina.

Four years of struggle and Victories

In this V International Conference we have evaluated our main struggles, actions and activities since the IV International Conference that took place in Itaici, Brazil, in June of 2004. Among them we highlighted the massive mobilizations against the WTO, against Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) in different parts of the world, and against the G8 in Rostock and Hokkaido. In 2005 La Via Campesina was very present in the days of struggle against the WTO Summit in Hong Kong, thus participating in the most recent of the actions with which we social movements have paralyzed the negotiations at WTO summits since Seattle in 1999. We have also played central roles in other mobilizations against the WTO over the last 4 years, from Geneva to India.

In 2007 we organized, with our principal allies, the International Forum on Food Sovereignty in Nyéléni, Mali. This was a crucial moment in the building of a broad and global movement for Food Sovereignty. More than 500 delegates from the most important social movements of the planet participated, and we defined a strategic agenda for the coming years. Both before and after Nyéléni we organized many national and regional meetings on Food Sovereignty. In recent years we have been able to get the concept sovereignty incorporated in national constitutions and/or laws in countries like Ecuador, Bolivia, Nepal, Mali, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

Through our Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, which is the expression of our struggles for land and in defense of territory, we co-organized the World Forum for Agrarian Reform in Valencia, Spain in 2004, and in 2006 we organized the International Meeting of the Landless in Porto Alegre, Brazil, before the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN). There we participated in the Brazilian women's mobilizations against the 'green deserts' of Eucalyptus monocultures of the TNC Aracruz, on March 8, and in the Parallel Forum, achieving important advances in the positions of the governments. In 2007 in Nepal we organized the International Conference on Food Sovereignty, Agrarian Reform and Peasant Rights.

In 2004 we held an international fair for exchange of local seed varieties, in the context of our IV Conference in Brazil. In 2005 we organized the International Conference on Seeds called "Liberate Diversity," as part of our global struggle in favor of peasant seeds and against GMOs and terminator technology. Via Campesina Brazil organized powerful mobilizations during the International Conference of the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP-8) in March, 2006 in Curitiba, Brazil. We had major activities on these same issues in Mysore, India that same year, and in 2008 in Bonn, Germany, and in France where our hunger strike was key to achieving prohibition of Monsanto's GMO maize. In Brazil in 2007, Keno, a leader of the MST, was assassinated by a gunman hired by Syngenta; but one year later we forced Syngenta to hand illegal areas used for GMO experimentation over to the government.

La Via Campesina, together with other social movements, organized the "Solidarity Village" as a parallel event to the Conference on Climate Change that the UN organized in Bali, Indonesia (2007), where we advanced the argument that peasant agriculture cools the planet.

In 2008 in Jakarta, Indonesia, we organized an international conference focused on our proposal for an International Declaration of Peasant Rights. Prior to this international conference we held an Assembly of Women on the Rights of Peasants.

The commitment to solidarity of La Via Campesina was made evident in 2004 with our global efforts to channel alternative aid to the victims of the Tsunami, in 2007 with three delegations to meetings with the Zapatistas in Mexico,

and every year with important actions in solidarity with those who are being victimized by the criminalization of social protest on all continents.

The displacement of rural peoples as a result of the neo-liberal model is provoking the mass movement of peoples, turning migration into a critical issue for Via Campesina. Since 2004 we have been developing strategies and actions on migration in our new International Working Group on Migration and Rural Workers. We have undertaken major actions against the 'wall of shame' being built in the United States.

From town to town and country to country, we have taken up the struggles of La Via Campesina. Our movement is present in almost every place on the Earth, wherever neo-liberalism is being imposed on peasants and rural communities.

The struggle of La Via Campesina inspires, stimulates and generates resistance by social movements against neo-liberal policies. The number of countries with progressive governments is on the rise, gaining power as a result of years of popular mobilizations. A good number of local and national governments have accentuated their resistance, and their interest in the agenda of Food Sovereignty, as a result of popular mobilizations and as a response to the global crisis of the food prices.

The offensive of capital in the countryside, the multiple crises, and the displacement of peasant and indigenous peoples In the current global context we are confronting the convergence of the food crisis, the climate crisis, the energy crisis and the financial crisis. These crises have common origins in the capitalist system and more recently in the unrestrained de-regulation in various spheres of economic activity, as part of the neo-liberal model, which gives priority to business and profit. In the rural zones of the world, we have seen a ferocious offensive of capital and of transnational corporations (TNCs) to take over land and natural assets (water, forests, minerals, biodiversity, land, etc.), that translates into a privatizing war to steal the territories and assets of peasants and indigenous peoples. This war uses false pretexts and deliberately erroneous arguments, for example to claim that agrofuels are a solution for the climactic and energy crises, when the truth is exactly the opposite. Whenever peoples exercise their rights and resist this generalized pillage, or when they are obliged to join migrant flows, the response is always more criminalization, more repression, more political prisoners, more assassinations, more walls of shame and more military bases.

Declaration of Peasant Rights

We see a future UN Declaration of Peasant Rights as a key tool in the international legal system to strengthen our position and our rights as peasants and family farmers. For this reason we are launching the Global Campaign for a Declaration of Peasant Rights.

Food Sovereignty: the solution to the crisis, and for the life of peoples

Nevertheless, the current situation of crisis is also an opportunity, because Food Sovereignty offers the only real alternative both for the life of peoples, as well as for reversing the current global crises. Food Sovereignty responds to the food, climate and energy crises with local food grown by peasants and family farmers, attacking two of the principle sources of greenhouse gas emissions, the long distance transportation of foods and industrialized agriculture. It also offers relief to a particularly nefarious aspect of the financial crisis, by prohibiting speculation in food futures contracts. While the dominant model truly means crisis and death, Food Sovereignty means the life and hope of the rural peoples and of consumers. Food Sovereignty requires the protection and re-nationalization of national food markets, the promotion of local circuits of production and consumption, the struggle for land, the defense of the territories of indigenous peoples, and comprehensive agrarian reform. It is also based on the transformation the production model toward agro-ecological and sustainable farming, without pesticides and without GMOs, based on the knowledge of peasants, family farmers and indigenous peoples. As a general principle, Food Sovereignty is built on the basis of our concrete local experiences, in other words, from the local to the national.

The crisis is causing incalculable suffering among our peoples and has eroded the legitimacy of the neo-liberal model of "free trade," such that some progressive local, state and national governments have begun to seek alternative solutions. In La Via Campesina we must be capable of taking advantage of these opportunities.

We have to develop a working methodology that includes critical and constructive dialog to achieve successful cases of implementation of Food Sovereignty with these governments. We also need to take advantage of international spaces of "alternative integration," such as ALBA and Petrocaribe, to advance in this terrain. But we must not only bet on governments, but rather build Food Sovereignty from below in the territories and other spaces controlled by popular movements, indigenous peoples, etc. The time has come for Food Sovereignty and we need to take the initiative to make progress in all of our countries. We peasants and family farmers of the world can and want to feed the world, our families and our communities, with healthy and accessible foods.

Multinational corporations and free trade

Our reflections have made it clear to us that multinational corporations and international finance capital are our most important common enemies, and that as such, we have to bring our struggle to them more directly. They are the ones behind the other enemies of peasants, like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the FTAs and EPAs, neoliberal governments, as well as aggressive economic expansionism,

imperialism and militarism. Now is also the time to redouble our struggle against FTAs and EPAs, and against the WTO, but this time more clearly indicating the central role played by the TNCs.

The advance of women is the advance of La Via Campesina

One issue was very clear in this V Conference, that all the forms of violence that women face in our societies -among them physical, economic, social, cultural and macho violence, and violence based on differences of power - are also present in rural communities, and as a result, in our organizations. This, in addition to being a principal source of injustice, also limits the success of our struggles. We recognize the intimate relationships between capitalism, patriarchy, machismo and neo-liberalism, in detriment to the women peasants and farmers of the world. All of us together, women and men of La Via Campesina, make a responsible commitment to build new and better human relationships among us, as a necessary part of the construction of the new societies to which we aspire. For this reason during this V Conference we decided to break the silence on these issues, and are launching the World Campaign "For an End to Violence Against Women." We commit ourselves anew, with greater strength, to the goal of achieving that complex but necessary true gender parity in all spaces and organs of debate, discussion, analysis and decision-making in La Via Campesina, and to strengthen the exchange, coordination and solidarity among the women of our regions.

We recognize the central role of women in agriculture for food self-sufficiency, and the special relationship of women with the land, with life and with seeds. In addition, we women have been and are a guiding part of the construction of Via Campesina from its beginning. If we do not eradicate violence towards women within our movement, we will not advance in our struggles, and if we do not create new gender relations, we will not be able to build a new society.

We are not alone: the building of alliances

By ourselves, we peasants and family farmers cannot win our struggles for dignity, for a just food and agrarian system, and for that other world that is possible. We have to build and reinforce our organic and strategic alliances with movements and organizations that share our vision, and this is a special commitment of the V Conference.

Youth provide our hope for a better future

The dominant model in rural areas does not offer any options to young people. Youth are our base for the present and the future, so we commit ourselves to the full integration and creative participation of young people in all levels of our struggle.

Education to strengthen our movement

In order to have greater success and victories in our struggles, we need to dedicate ourselves to the internal strengthening of our movement, by political formation to build our capacity to interpret and transform our realities, by training, and by improving communication and articulation among ourselves and with our allies.

Diversity and unity in the defense of peasant agriculture

As an international social movement, we can say that one of our greatest strengths is our ability to unite different cultures and ways of thinking in one single movement. La Via Campesina represents a common commitment to resist, and to struggle for life and for peasant and family farm agriculture.

All the participants of the V Conference of La Via Campesina are committed to the defense of food and of peasant agriculture, the right to Food Sovereignty, to dignity and to life. We are here, the peasants and rural peoples of the world, and we refuse to disappear.

Globalize Struggle! Globalize Hope!