

La Via Campesina

*International peasant movement
Movimiento campesino internacional
Mouvement paysan international*

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To: Mr Jacques Diouf , Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

To: Mr. Yasuo Fukuda, Prime Minister of Japan, President of the G8

To: Mr. John W. Ashe, Permanent UN representative, Antigua and Barbuda's Permanent and Chairman of the Group of 77

From: Henry Saragih, International Coordinator for La Via Campesina

Jakarta, April 28, 2008

OPEN LETTER

Concrete measures are needed to strengthen peasant and farmer-based food production; the food price crisis exposes the instability of liberalized agricultural markets.

Dear Mr. Diouf, Mr. Fukuda, and Mr. Ashe,

Our movement, La Via Campesina, consists of millions of small farmers and landless workers in more than 60 countries around the world. Although we are the ones producing food for our families and communities, many of us are hungry or living in poverty. Over the last months, the situation has worsened due to the sudden rise in food prices. We are also severely hit by the crisis because many of us do not have enough land to feed our families, and because most producers do not benefit from those high prices. Large traders, speculators, supermarkets and industrial farms are cashing in on and benefitting from this crisis.

This current food crisis is the result of many years of deregulation of agricultural markets, the privatization of state regulatory bodies and the dumping of agricultural products on the markets of developing countries. According to the FAO, liberalized markets have attracted huge cash flows that seek to speculate on agricultural products on the “futures” markets and other financial instruments.

The corporate expansion of agrofuels and the initially enthusiastic support for agrofuels in countries such as the US, EU and Brazil have added to the expectation that land for food will become more and more scarce. On top of this in many southern countries hundreds of thousands of hectares are converted from agricultural uses in an uncontrolled way for so-called economic development zones, urbanization and infrastructure. The ongoing land grabbing by Transnational Companies (TNCs) and other speculators will expel millions more peasants who will end up in the mega cities where they will be added to the ranks of the hungry and poor in the slums. Besides this, we may expect especially in Africa and South Asia more severe droughts and floods caused by global climate change. These are severe threats for the rural as well as for

the urban areas.

These are highly worrying developments that need active and urgent action! We need a fundamental change in the approach to food production and agricultural markets!

Time to rebuild national food economies!

Rebuilding national food economies will require immediate and long-term political commitments from governments. An absolute priority has to be given to domestic food production in order to decrease dependency on the international market. Peasants and small farmers should be encouraged through better prices for their farm products and stable markets to produce food for themselves and their communities. Landless families from rural and urban areas have to get access to land, seeds and water to produce their own food. This means increased investment in peasant and farmer-based food production for domestic markets.

Governments have to provide financial support for the poorest consumers to allow them to eat. Speculation and extremely high prices forced upon consumers by traders and retailers have to be controlled. Peasants and small farmers need better access to their domestic markets so that they can sell food at fair prices for themselves and for consumers.

Countries need to set up intervention mechanisms aimed at stabilizing market prices. In order to achieve this, import controls with taxes and quotas are needed to avoid low-priced imports which undermine domestic production. National buffer stocks managed by the state have to be built up to stabilize domestic markets: in times of surplus, cereals can be taken from the market to build up the reserve stocks and in case of shortages, cereals can be released.

Regulating international markets and supporting countries to strengthen their food production

At the international level, stabilization measures also have to be undertaken. International buffer stocks have to be built up and an intervention mechanism put in place to stabilize prices on international markets at a reasonable level. Exporting countries have to accept international rules to control the quantities they can bring to the market, in order to stop dumping. The right to implement import controls, set up programs to support the poorest consumers, implement agrarian reform and invest in domestic, farmer-peasant-based food production has to be fully respected and supported at the international level.

We ask the FAO, based on its mandate, to take the initiative and create the political environment for a fundamental change in food policies. In the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) a broad majority of governments recognized and agreed on the importance of rural development and agrarian reform to combat poverty and hunger in the rural areas. The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), an assessment of the agricultural sector that involved Civil Society organizations, the private sector, and governments as well as the FAO and the World Bank came to the conclusion that corporate-led agriculture and the increasing dependence of peasants and small farmers is at the heart of the problem. They also concluded that peasant, and farmer-based sustainable agriculture has to be supported and strengthened. The International Fund on Agricultural Development (IFAD) also recognizes the key role of peasants and small farmers in the production of food.

We request that G8 governments allow these initiatives to be taken. They should stop the promotion of agrofuels as these are no solution for the climate crisis and add to the destruction of forests. Especially in the southern countries, agrofuels occupy millions of hectares that should

remain available for food production.

We also demand that the G8 analyze critically their own agricultural policies, take initiatives to stop the ongoing volatility of the international markets and shift their financial support away from industrial agriculture towards sustainable family farmer-based food production.

We also demand that the G8 stop and cancel any free trade agreements that will only contribute to the destruction of food production in developing countries and block any possibility of autonomous industrial development.

The influence of transnational corporations and financial speculative interests has to be controlled as much as possible and kept away from the the international food market. Food is too important to be left to business alone.

A possible WTO agreement in the Doha Round will mean another blow for peasant-based food production. We demand that the governments of the G77 assess again the WTO negotiations on agriculture in the Doha round and reject any agreement that has negative implications for domestic food production and does not allow the taking of all necessary measures to strengthen food production and increase national self sufficiency.

Peasants and small farmers are the main food producers

La Via Campesina is convinced that peasants and small farmers can feed the world. They have to be the key part of the solution. With sufficient political will and the implementation of adequate policies, more peasants and small farmers, men and women, will easily produce sufficient food to feed the growing population. The current situation shows that changes are needed!

The time for Food Sovereignty has come!

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry Saragih". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "H" and a long, sweeping tail.

Henry Saragih
International Coordinator for La Via Campesina