

ROAD TO NYELENI 2007 – N°2

Real World Radio - Pre-coverage World Forum Food Sovereignty – Mali, February 2007

WSF 2007 - Nairobi: "Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform in Africa" was Launched

The struggle for agrarian reform has been going on for several decades in Latin America, but peasants have not always been the only ones promoting agrarian reform in the different countries.

Currently, Via Campesina—which gathers peasant movements from all over the world—leads the struggle for agrarian reform in Latin America and Asia.

But the farmer movement accepted a new challenge on Tuesday: now, it seeks to take on the agrarian reform process also in Africa. With that aim, it launched a global campaign in Nairobi, Kenya, where the 7th World Social Forum was being held.

Real World Radio interviewed Maria del Carmen Barroso, leader of the Cuban National Association of Small-Scale Farmers and member of Via Campesina, in order to find out more about this new global campaign.

"We launched a global campaign for agrarian reform in Africa, one of the continents where peasants are poorest", Barroso said.

Before the launch, Via Campesina worked for two days at the WSF, emphasizing the experiences shared by African organizations, which explained the reality of the African countryside and the management of natural resources.

The new campaign, aimed at the world's poorest continent, will include "missions" of Via Campesina's leaders to African countries. These missions will be aimed at "supporting and accompanying the Africans in this struggle", Barroso explained.

During these missions, the peasant leaders will seek for meetings with government representatives, especially with those in charge of agriculture and land issues, Barroso added.

Barroso regretted that in Africa "more and more people die of hunger and—paradoxically—they have less chances to produce their own food every day". She added that this is related to the life standards of African non-peasant sectors.

The big food transnational companies' pressure to absorb new markets is both cause and consequence of this, leading to poverty, lack of food security, food dependence and lack of peoples' sovereignty over their agriculture and food.

"The impossibility for peasants to produce food does not only affect peasants but doctors, students, workers, cab drivers. We must raise awareness on that", the Cuban farmer leader said.

Barroso also said the Cuban president Fidel Castro's support to Cuban peasants has been very positive. She outlined that since the agrarian reform of 1959, peasants have had access to land, inputs and credits, besides being included in education and healthcare systems.

Permanent Mobilization, Permanent Resistance to Neoliberalism

Via Campesina proposed that instead of having a World Social Forum (WSF) in January 2008, the social movements should destine the entire month to organize protests all over the world.

The watchwords of these protests will be the opposition to the war, the struggle to recover natural resources in the benefit of the peoples, the integration with solidarity and the issue of power, in a century led by the United States, its Army and its corporations.

The international peasant movement believes the WSF process is very important, but they believe next year should be destined to protest and struggle for agrarian reform.

Real World Radio interviewed Via Campesina leaders Rafael Alegria and Juana Ferrer, who is also the coordinator of the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations.

According to Honduran peasant leader Rafael Alegria—former international coordinator of Via Campesina—"the organization of the World Social Forum year after year leaves us without time, and these are days of struggle, especially in our continent".

According to Alegria, Latin America's current scenario is "exceptional", because of the several leftist governments that have reached power and the active role of the social movements—especially the indigenous and peasant movements—aimed at reverting the situations caused by neoliberalism.

Juana Ferrer said the WSF is aimed at "destroying the neoliberal model, by means of struggle, resistance and mobilization". The WSF is strategic, but it needs to be deepened, to be taken to "other regions", for it to reach "communities, peasant and indigenous villages and urban outskirts where people excluded by neoliberalism live".

Ferrer said "it is not enough to come and participate at the forum every year or every two years, we need to mobilize permanently against the neoliberal model".

This year, Via Campesina will focus on several issues. According to Alegria, the campaigns for land, agrarian reform and recovery of natural resources "will be related to the struggle in defense of human rights". Alegria criticized the governments that violate the human rights of peasants, indigenous, women and fishermen and said: "we will force these governments to answer for their responsibilities before the United Nations".

"Food sovereignty is also culture, identity, a way of life"

Santiago del Estero's Peasant Movement (MOCASE) has become one of the main symbols of the peasant struggle in Argentina and the rest of Latin America. Although MOCASE is undergoing tough times—because several peasant families have been evicted from their lands in the past weeks—representatives of the movement travelled to Uruguay to participate in the Regional Forum on Food Sovereignty.

Deo Carrizo is a member of MOCASE's communication team. She is now in Paso Severino, Uruguay, to support the adoption of the food sovereignty principle in Latin America. Real World Radio interviewed Carrizo.

The Argentine peasant believes that "food sovereignty has to do with a lot of issues: it is not only about healthy and good quality food, but it is also having land to work on, to produce food".

"Food sovereignty is also culture, identity, a way of life. From the governments' perspective, it has to do with political decisions aimed at guaranteeing the right to quality and diverse food, according to the culture", Carrizo added.

The activist believes capitalism, "made up of big transnational companies and businessmen", is Latin America's main "enemy".

These big corporations "are destroying biodiversity, polluting natural goods such as water, making flora and fauna disappear, polluting the native seeds and making communities and peoples disappear", Carrizo explained.

"They are affecting the future generations", she added. "If we do not take specific actions aimed at reverting this in an organized and unified way, we will not be able to keep talking about the future generations, because we will be leaving them for tomorrow", Carrizo sentenced.

Forum in Resistance to Agribusiness – "The fact that our soils are destined to produce fuels condemns us to not producing food"

Interview with Carlos Vicente from GRAIN / Action for Biodiversity

GRAIN is an international organization that struggles in defense of seeds and the management of genetic resources by local communities and indigenous peoples. We have been accompanying this process, which has had an important moment now, with the Forum in Resistance to Agribusiness. The forum was born from the diagnosis made by the entire Southern Cone —Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay and Bolivia— whose territories have been destined to soy monoculture and for corporate agribusiness, including the management of seeds, agrochemicals, and the creation of green deserts of soy.

We want to denounce this, to denounce Monsanto, Syngenta and all the corporations that are poisoning us, displacing peasant peoples, invading us with GMOs. We also want to express that there are other possibilities, that food sovereignty is a real search of the peasant organizations as well as a very strong proposal, because what our peoples actually need is to produce food for the Southern Cone, not soy to feed pigs and chickens in the European Union or China.

As well as using soy to feed animals, soy and other oleaginous seeds will be used as biofuels. This is extremely serious, because we know that the planet, and especially the North's requirement of fuels are very high and the fact that our soils are destined to produce fuels from soy oil condemns us to not to produce food, and we will continue having green deserts.

We must also mention the awareness raised after the conflict between Uruguay and Argentina — due to the installation of pulp mills— on the threat posed by forestry monocultures. This has not only been denounced in Uruguay and Argentina, but also in the south of Brazil, after measures taken by the Movement of Landless Rural Workers against Aracruz Celulose. The landless peasants took a plantation last March and destroyed the crops, as a way to denounce the disaster caused by these monocultures.

The corporations now aim to fully control seeds, and in Argentina they have managed to get the Agriculture Secretary to restrict the use of seeds. A producer will be no longer able to save the seeds that he wants, which was an unquestionable right during the history of agriculture and was allowed by our law, but the Agriculture Secretary limited it in order to protect the interests of the

corporations that want to force the producers to buy seeds year after year.

The corporations aim to impose "terminator" seeds, suicide seeds, seeds that do not multiply once cultivated, dead seeds. We stopped this, thanks to the social mobilization, but we have to stay alert because corporations keep moving forward in the research on these seeds and we continue with the campaign aimed at obtaining an international ban on terminator seeds.

In the North, they do not want more pollution, for instance, pulp mills. There is a clear policy to move everything that is polluting, to move monocultures to the south. In the European Union, consumers want to eat organic food and they reject GMOs, so they do not want them there, and our territories are destined to be the place to put them, as long as we allow it.

Our struggle is aimed at raising awareness among the people and I hope that sometime, the governments realize that we cannot be in the hands of this bunch of corporations that decide the policies, instead of responding to the people's needs.

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