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**Joint written statement\* submitted by Europe-Third World Centre,  
a non-governmental organization in general consultative status, Women' International  
League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), France Libertés : Fondation Danielle Mitterrand,  
non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, and Movement contre le  
racism et pour l'amitié entre les peuples (MRAP), a non-governmental organization on the  
Roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in  
accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 May 2008]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

**To promote and strengthen the agricultural local and national economies:  
only effective way to fight against prices escalation of agricultural products and their  
shortage<sup>1</sup>**

The current crisis of agricultural raw materials severely affects the poorest peoples of our planet. Prices on the world market for cereals are rising for a year : wheat prices increased by 130%, rice 80% and maize 35%.<sup>2</sup>

This crisis has not one single cause. 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 (particularly markets of developing countries). The commercial development of agrofuels does not help in this case. This production has got a heavy pressure on arable land and aquifer reserves. 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 adequately. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> This declaration was drafted in collaboration with La Vía Campesina, [www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org).  
<sup>2</sup> Crop Prospects and Food situation by FAO, 2008.

### **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.

In this context, the development of ethanol throughout the world as a solution to the depletion of fossil resources is a chimera because it is not, in its present form, a real and viable alternative to fossil fuels and will not help to reduce global warming. On the contrary, this production is seriously imperiling the traditional function of agriculture—namely supplying food to human being and animal—by monopolizing not only lands and continuing to destroy primary forests, etc., but also by diverting the food chain of raw materials essential to life for the benefit of car industry.<sup>3</sup>

The promotion of GMO farming is another false solution to the food crisis, since they do not respect the principle of precaution and that the first studies on this issue indicate the danger of irreversible negative impact on nature (on biodiversity in particular) and that this farming is not even reliable on the economic level.

### **Consensus on the international level?**

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.

La Vía 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!

To do so, states must commit themselves **clearly in favor of food sovereignty**. As it is well-described by the international peasant movement, La Vía Campesina, food sovereignty is the right for all countries or a group of countries to define its agricultural and food policy for the good of its people, to protect its farmers and agricultural producers and

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<sup>3</sup> See the CETIM statement on the agrofuels available on the web page: [http://cetim.ch/en/interventions\\_details.php?iid=285](http://cetim.ch/en/interventions_details.php?iid=285)

its local markets from dumping and agricultural imports of food of lower price, so that they manage to sustainably meet needs of a wholesome and safe feeding that is culturally acceptable and ecologically cultivated. In the meantime, it must be the pedestal for a fair reward to the local farmers and agricultural producers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of what has been mentioned above, governments of industrialized countries (both from the North and the South) must stop the promotion of agrofuels as they are not currently a viable solution on both economic and environmental levels.

These countries must analyze their own agricultural policies in a critical manner, take initiatives to stop the volatility of international markets and financially support agriculture, not the agro-industry, but a food production based on the sustainable family agriculture. They must stop giving any support, direct or indirect, for the export of agricultural products at dumping prices. Mechanisms of international controls of the Chicago Stock Exchange, which sets the prices of grains, should be introduced.

Governments of industrialized countries must stop and cancel any free trade agreement contributing only to the destruction of food production in developing countries and blocking any possibility of autonomous development.

The influence of transnational corporations and financial speculative interests has to be controlled as much as possible and kept away from 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.

In this context, the FAO, on the basis of its mandate, must take the initiative to create the political environment for a fundamental change on the level of policies on agriculture and food.

As for Council on Human Rights, it could recommend to the UN General Assembly to decree a moratorium, of at least five years, on GMO crops as well as the manufacture of agrofuels to work out an assessment.

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