

MIJARC

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON“ LAND GRABBING AND THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY” IN AROORMUZHY

The International Movement of Catholic Agricultural Rural Youth (MIJARC) organised an international symposium on “land grabbing and threats to biodiversity” in conjunction with its member movement, Kerala Catholic Youth Movement (KCYM)

Around 100 people from the diocese of Iranjalakuda gathered together on Saturday, 24th July in Aroormuzhy to take part in this symposium. Since MIJARC has launched its World Food Day campaign on land grabbing in the afternoon, the organizers took the occasion to discuss with people and members of KCYM from the diocese of Iranjalakuda.

Mr.P. P. James, deputy editor of the “Kerala Koumudi Daily” and former Asian coordinator of MIJARC Asia, moderated the symposium, whose panel was composed of Dr. C.R. Neelakandan, the famous Indian environmentalist, Mr. P.C. Cyriac IAS, the former chairman of the Indian Rubber Board and the Secretary General of MIJARC, Carolin Grieshop. The panellists gave a statement on their view about land grabbing and its impact on biodiversity and the participants of the symposium started afterwards a good and miscellaneous discussion on this topic.

MIJARC motivation to launch the symposium was to collect different points of views and experiences about land grabbing. While Dr. C.R. Neelakandan and Carolin Grieshop gave a clear statement against land grabbing, Mr. P.C. Cyriac highlighted the need of land in India, for example to produce rubber. Participants reacted in different manners.

MIJARC against land grabbing Land grabbing leads to a contraction of small holders farming, with negative impacts on farm jobs and a risk of depletion of rural areas. There is an increased competition over land (land becomes less affordable and direct farming regresses), discouraging the settlement of young farmers; a degradation of food security for the host country; and has a negative impact on environment (deforestation, destruction of ecosystems, overexploitation of water resources, spread of phyto-sanitary products, monoculture). Thus social and political trouble at the local and sometimes national level are foreseeable and are already happening, e.g. in Uganda. Members of CARYM Uganda, a member movement of MIJARC, reported about displacement and violations of farmers’ rights in Uganda. These kinds of violations have to be stopped.

The panellists in the symposium mentioned the complex and hugely diverse picture of global land grabbing. They explained that new landowners appear to be corporations, which have never been in agriculture before, such as banks or equity investments funds. While hosting governments have limited capacities and legal expertise, experienced investors make a profit of these negotiations. Panellists stated that effective national land policies and land tenure systems for a sustainable land management are needed, as well as a consultation and participation of local small-scale farmers and vulnerable groups from an early stage. The Voluntary Guidelines on land tenure, elaborated by FAO, and the Code of conduct for responsible agro- investment (World bank) at international level are not sufficient.

After the symposium participants went jointly in busses to Chalakudy to attend the launching of the World Food Day campaign, under the theme “Stop land grabbing- this soil is our future!”

MIJARC, the International Movement for Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth was founded in 1954 by six national European movements. Today it consists of 60 member movements with 2 million members in Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia. In these movements young rural people commit themselves to contribute to a sustainable rural development. Through a variety of campaigns and activities the movement succeeds in representing the interests of the rural youth within society and the Church.

MIJARC enjoys recognition by the Vatican and holds consultative status in UNESCO, ILO, ECOSOC as well as collaboration with the Conference of ICOs, CIDSE/Caritas International and IPC, the International Planification Committee.

Land grabbing is an emerging phenomenon which badly hits farmers and rural poor in many parts of the world. State and private investors are leasing or buying up millions of hectares of farmlands in Asia, Africa and Latin America for food and fuel production or for investments. This is a new way for the “foreign investors” to exploit the local population with less economic and political risks.