

**FINAL STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE MIJARC-FIMARC SEMINAR
LE CHANT D'OISEAU – BRUSSELS - MAY 2-9
SOLIDARITY ECONOMY**

We, 34 young and adult leaders of rural Christian movements affiliated to MIJARC (International Movement for Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth) or FIMARC (International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements) have shared together our experiences in solidarity economy. Coming from 16 different countries spread over 4 continents, we explored in detail some alternatives to the dominating neo liberal and capitalist system.

In spite of the major problems we cope with in our continents (difficulties in getting access to the land, to water, agricultural policies detrimental to farmers, young people lacking interest in agriculture, increasing discrepancies among the rich and the poor...), we highlighted the multifaceted mobilization of young and adult activists in solidarity economy initiatives : fighting for land access, training, setting up of local development groups, direct sales/exchanges amongst producers and consumers. The narrow scope and isolated nature of such initiatives, rich in experimentations, mean that they have no weight compared to the prevailing neo liberal economy.

Through micro-credits, fair trade or inclusive companies, we managed to measure some benefits: credit accessibility for the poorest, minimum price secured for selling agricultural products, job creation for people marginalized by mainstream companies. However, there are many traps: micro-credits can be the beginning of a capitalist approach aiming at bleeding the poorest. The major distribution groups try to turn fair trade into an additional component of their product range. Inclusive companies export part of their production which leads to the collapse of local markets.

The neo liberal system does only consider human beings as economic agents. States become non-existent when faced with multinational companies. The economy is driven by financial benefits and is fed with financial speculations which have nothing to do with a genuine production in line with human needs. It puts up with formal democracy, but controls policies, the media, on top of the market. It prides itself with a scientific approach which makes it possible to state that there is no other alternative.

We are often sad to see that our hierarchy is untouched by the suffering of rural people and we consider unacceptable the lack of official commitment to condemn GMOs : first of all because of the destruction of the biodiversity and secondly because of the privatisation of life. We are also the Church. All the rural people are our brothers and sisters. We must express ourselves freely, without fear, convinced by the fruitfulness of Christianity, we must remain vigilant and maintain our focus on the human being when faced with a neo liberal economy 'as a structure of sin' (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n°36 and 37).

In view of all that, we state that social economy/solidarity economy is not meant to fill in political gaps; it is a political proposal which has to give an overall consistency to the many initiatives emerging in the field and offer an alternative to the neo liberal system.

Solidarity economy meets the needs of people and communities. Producers have to keep the situation under control, thanks to ongoing education and participative democracy. The emphasis is to be on people and their work, not on capital. Solidarity economy gives a greater importance to local and sustainable development, secures gender equality without damaging the resources of future generations. It secures fundamental rights for all (food, housing, education) while the neo liberal system guarantees their accessibility... to those who can afford it.

Our movements, actors of social transformations, want to give to their constituencies an inclination for initiative and common work for the common good. It is up to us to promote our methodology 'See, Judge, Act, Evaluate' with a view to make a rigorous analysis of the realities experienced by the rural people, to stick to our beliefs until the very end and to act in solidarity with the poorest. We also measured what was at stake: our individual and collective behaviours should be consistent with the challenges of a genuine solidarity.

Rural people are the victims of neo liberal policies, in particular young people, who are forced to migrate to get a job, a situation which speeds up poverty in many rural regions deprived of their living strength for the future. It is urgent to make engaged choices in terms of solidarity economy so that young people will stay and work in their country.

We are convinced of the need for a holistic approach, taking on board political, cultural, social and environmental dimensions as well as the reality of our multicultural world. It is therefore vital to invest in education, to act legally in favour of the respect of rights – mainly of the most underprivileged- to get mobilized to convince and to lobby at the local and international level.

We are mobilized to promote our objective of solidarity economy and, through it, a genuine food sovereignty. That is why we call on our elected representatives to state in a tangible way their political will towards solidarity economy:

- offering sustainable prospects to the initiatives currently under way in the field;
- reversing the trend in favour of the neo liberal system which contaminates everything

We emphasized the fruitfulness of the exchange between the young rural people and the adults who cope with the same realities. We are aware of the fact that there is still a long way to go, riddled with difficulties. But we are also convinced that 'another world is possible'. It is already emerging and we are critical actors, by establishing, amongst others, alliances with consumers and our fellow citizens. We are committed to:

- identify local experiences and initiatives and network them;
- organize capacity-building training sessions for our members and organisations;
- develop exchanges of good practice amongst the movements in our continent with a view to build on our experiences, expand our projects and act upon public policies.

Brussels, 09/05/2007