

## **Final declaration of the Executive Committee of FIMARC**

We, the Executive committee of FIMARC coming from all continents and mandated by the world Assembly of FIMARC met in Assesse, Belgium, for a session on the topic **“Land access and rights in the context of land grabbing”**.

### **Land**

From the beginning of creation, God created the earth and entrusted it to man to protect and use to produce food in harmony with all creation. So land is a principle resource, without which no life. Land is our mother, in her womb we were formed, and we will return to her in our rest. People who own the land have the honor and the dignity and power to control. Rural people define land as their social status, food, education and health. By these last definitions our land is valuable and can't be compared with even gold, weapons, cars, buildings as it is more precious than all. It's the mystery and key to life. "No land" means "No life".

### **Land Access and control**

In Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe, land was owned communally and the local farmers could easily access to land to produce food for their families and the communities. Today this is no longer the case and states have taken control over land. Access to land by small family farmers is becoming more and more difficult. Foreign investors (governments, TNCs, individuals etc) have more access to land than the small scale farmers. Land is accessed through Governments' and their officials or agents, local investors who speculate and buy huge chunks of land. Agreements are made secretly between governments for different purposes but not to produce food for the local populations.

Land is directly or indirectly being controlled by the powerful states, private investors, equity and mutual companies and financial institutions and even World Bank, and International Monetary Fund through their market oriented policies and programs. This really influence land policies in the southern states. Governments in Sub Saharan Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe have been compromised to implement a privatization policy, thus making land an economic commodity which can only be accessed by those with economic and political power. Very violent conflicts emerge within and between communities over land issues. The communal land ownership is no more existing in many places. This is a violation of the right of the communities - as they used to have land in a community based approach. Privatization has introduced leasing of land to nationals and foreigners, a systematic way of completely dismantling the customary land tenure system and common property rights. Using the growing populations as an excuse, Governments are giving large chunks of land to investors who are putting up housing facilities and the promotion of tourism industry which can never be accessed by the poor communities. Access to and control of land by farmers and local communities is a fundamental condition for food sovereignty.

### **Land grabbing and its consequences**

Access and control over land is a pre requisite to realize the right to food for all. But in recent times land grabbing has largely increased. States and private enterprises act together with influential local intermediaries to buy or rent land and thus affecting the lives and the livelihood of the rural population. The perpetrators of land grabbers are making profits on land without any concern for farmers' rights and dignity, or the food safety and sovereignty of the people. It leads to farmers' marginalization and to transform many of them into "farmers without land." It impoverishes the local and native communities, by destroying the earth, the productive resources, accelerate the destruction of the ecosystem through the introduction of monoculture, and aggravate the climatic crisis.

As a result of this phenomenon millions of inhabitants are deprived of their ancestral territory for the profit of foreign or national private enterprises. This is also in many cases, creating a social vacuum while displacing the population. Land must be available for those who need it to feed and feed the local populations, in a sustainable way.

Land, the only means of subsistence of the local populations is taken and often they have been expelled from their own land due to the lack of legal protection to defend their land rights and tenure. In the context of land grabbing, small farmers becomes vulnerable as the profit motive investors or states violate even the existing laws and regulations. FIMARC notices the ongoing trends of the privatization of common resources most especially in Africa as well as in the indigenous communities of Latin America and Asia.

The transactions to rent or to sell land are occurring without the consent of the people in a transparent manner. FIMARC condemns such violation of the right of the communities. We also note the exodus of young people due to various constraints on land and productive resources and the deprival of the property rights of women.

Land should be considered as a non-speculative property, controlled by the farmers and customary law. The agricultural policy must be decided by the people, to restore power to small farmers. We want to emphasis that states should enact legislation to protect and accurately indicate the conditions under which the changes in land use can takes place, and the procedure to be followed in this matter to permanently guarantee the rights of local communities. We need land policies and legal tenure systems to secure the land of populations and local communities. To ensure

land rights for the most vulnerable, the implementation of genuine agrarian reforms is key.

We take note of the process of FAO Guidelines on Governance of Land and Natural Resources and we support this process provided that affected and vulnerable people are consulted and participate in it. It should be based on human rights, guarantee people's right to land and support family farming. It should be the binding legal instruments to be implemented at national and international levels.

We criticize the World Bank principals for responsible agricultural investment (RAI) due to the fact that it is illegitimate and inadequate to address the phenomenon of land grabbing agenda which is presented in a sweeter term called Agricultural investment.

Land grabbing favors an agricultural system oriented towards large scale monoculture using GMO's, the replacement of farmers by machines, an exaggerated use of chemical products and non renewable energies. This agriculture is for the profit of some people and not for feeding the local population. It is just nourishing the benefit of a small number and increases the poverty of the others.

By joining the fight against land grabbing we are acting for the defense of the resources in land, water, biodiversity, environment, etc.

At this context FIMARC wants to express the solidarity to the following struggles of the local population where our movements are actively involved for example

- The struggle of the people in Orissa, India who are expelled from their land by the construction of a big mining and steel plant by Posco.
- The struggle of the people at Fray Ventos near the coast of river Uruguay and Gualeguaychu city in Argentina who are threatened of land eviction due to the construction of a big paper factory from Finland which also will severely pollute the river.

We are sure that family farming agriculture can feed the population of a country, of a region and has thus to be promoted. It is urgent to invest in organic farming or in an agriculture more respectful of the environment to save the biodiversity that is everywhere at risk.

It is necessary to implement an agrarian reforms based on Food sovereignty to fairly redistribute the land, to ensure the small farmers' access to natural and productive resources - in particular, land and water - and fair and equitable controls to those resources.

We assert finally that we cannot accept any forms of land grabbing and we are strongly calling for the immediate stopping of all the land grabbing projects as theft of land is not acceptable and non negotiable for the local populations.

Assesse, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011