

## **A Call to Action** **On World Foodless Day 2008:** **Assert Our Rights to Land and Food**

### **Background**

The world is experiencing a global food crisis which is fueling food riots from Haiti, Mexico, and Cameroon to the Philippines, Indonesia and Bangladesh. Most of the food riots are happening in underdeveloped countries where workers and peasants have become less and less able to afford food due to skyrocketing prices. Paradoxically, this is happening in a world that produces enough food for all people.

Droughts and floods have affected production and harvest and the rising cost of petrol has driven the switch to agrofuel production which is further resulting in grain shortages. However, actual food production and consumption in 2007 shows that production of most food items is above consumption except for wheat and corn. As reported by the NGO, Grain, "Stocks are at their lowest level in 30 years, it's true, but the bottom line is that there is enough food produced in the world to feed the population. We have allowed food to be transformed from something that nourishes people and provides them with secure livelihoods into a commodity for speculation and bargaining".

***Food, which is for nourishment and livelihoods, is now being treated as a commodity for trade, speculation and profiteering.***

Ironically, while the world is lamenting on food shortages, the giant agribusiness transnational corporations (TNCs) such as Cargill and grain traders such as Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) have increased their profits from commodity trading as of the first quarter of 2008 by 86% and 67%, respectively. Thailand's Charoen Pokphand Foods, a major player in Asia, is forecasting revenue growth of 237% this year<sup>1</sup>. In early 2008, billions of dollars as speculative investment were poured into food commodities to escape sliding stock markets and the credit crunch. Based on estimates, investment funds now control up to 60% of the wheat traded on the world's biggest commodity markets. This has made prices more volatile and divorced prices from the realities of production.

The way out of this crisis according to the IMF, World Bank, ADB, FAO and the WTO are the very same old solutions they have prescribed in the past-- greater liberalization, in particular the resumption and completion of the WTO Doha Round of negotiations as well as intensifying and increasing the expansion of corporate agriculture. Together, these had in the first place aggravated the global food crisis and intensified TNC profiteering.

Indeed, the world food crisis is not a circumstantial phenomenon. The current negative effects and manifestations show that this crisis is of a systemic and structural nature. In the eighties, developing countries were forced to implement neoliberal policies through the WB/IMF Structural Adjustment Programmes followed by Poverty Reduction Strategy Program; and further intensified by the WTO and regional and bilateral trade agreements. In food and agriculture, these globalization policies include liberalization of trade and investment in agriculture, privatization of public sectors such as irrigation, food trade, and deregulation of government roles in pricing and marketing. Part of this neoliberal package was the push for cash cropping, high-value crops, land use conversion, promotion of extractive industries and other "development" projects under foreign capital that further entrenched the monopoly control of agribusinesses in collusion with national elites.

The impact on peasants, agricultural workers, women, small food producers and the poor was tremendous including displacement of rural communities, increased loss of livelihoods, and escalating hunger and poverty. Overall these policies and their impact was the recipe for the current food crisis.

---

<sup>1</sup>Making a killing from hunger: We need to overturn food policy, now!, GRAIN, 2008. <http://www.grain.org/articles/?id=39>

## Call for Action

International institutions such as IFIs, WTO and the UN are using the food crisis to further impose their failed prescriptions of liberalization and corporate agriculture while agribusiness TNCs are minting profits.

For decades now, people's movements have been calling for genuine agrarian reform; local markets; the right to adequate, nutritious, safe and culturally appropriate food; access to land and productive resources for women; agroecological systems of food production and the right of communities and peoples to decide on food and agriculture policies, -- in short, for food sovereignty to address hunger and malnutrition and now the food crisis.

The occasion of **World Food Day on October 16** is an opportune time to send a strong message for food sovereignty and to highlight people's strategies to address the food crisis. We need to continue to expose the failure and the impact of neoliberal policies and the emptiness of its promises and the real beneficiaries of these policies.

This call is to observe **October 16, 2008 as World Foodless Day** to assert our food sovereignty and to commit to a **Day of Global Action** on the world food crisis with simultaneous events, protest actions and activities globally.

### The Objectives of the World Foodless Day:

- Create public awareness and media attention on the root causes of the food crisis
- Provide policy recommendations and organize meetings with government officials, opinion makers and leaders
- Organize activities to raise our voices against neoliberal policies and their impact
- Highlight people's recommendations to respond to the world food crisis

While the Pesticide Action Network International and the People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS) and other civil society organizations, are initiating this call, we hope that as many groups as possible will use this day with activities to observe the World Foodless Day.

We at PAN International and PCFS are planning some resource materials to respond to the global food crisis which could be useful for the Day of Action:

- Publish a **Special Release on the Global Food Crisis: Hype and Reality** (please download at <http://www.panap.net/320.0.html>) . The issue covers the root causes of the world food crisis.
- Publish a **Resource Handbook on "The Politics of Hunger: When Policies and Markets Fail the Poor"** (please download at <http://www.panap.net/320.0.html>) with campaign materials that would be translated into French and Spanish. The handbook focuses on the impact of the world food crisis and the real solutions to the crisis including the need to prioritise support to small farmers and peasant ecological production which is productive and sustainable; and therefore to ensure genuine agrarian reform, and self-sufficiency as national policies. It also includes a section on people's organizations responses to the food crisis and recommendations.

The package of materials will also include a poster and a pamphlet. These materials will be available in early September.

We are inviting everyone to join us in this effort. Please get in touch with PAN AP c/o [panap@panap.net](mailto:panap@panap.net) and PCFS [secretariat@foodsov.org](mailto:secretariat@foodsov.org) for further information.

***Defend people's food sovereignty.  
Land to the landless.  
Safe food for all.***