



## editorial: land reform and food sovereignty

A wave of financial capital is crashing down upon the resources held in rural corners of the planet in the world today. In this process we see a financialization of rural goods and assets along with a (re)capitalizing of capitalistic extractive efforts through agribusiness. This is especially apparent in terms of monocrop exports, forestry plantations, agrofuels, mining companies and in the construction of megaprojects like dams, highways and tourist complexes. This in turn translates into land grabbing, dispossession, eviction, displacement and migration. Furthermore, peoples are criminalized, social protest stifled and our movements and struggles vilified by the media.

Capital is appropriating our territories. Hence, we must respond by turning the struggle for land into a struggle for *territory*. This will require forging unions between –on one side– peasant farmers, day laborers, indigenous peoples, nomad shepherds, artisan fishermen, forest peoples and other rural communities, and –on another– city dwellers, especially those in suburban communities and consumers. It will require producing healthy food using agroecology and know-how handed down from our ancestors and steeped in popular traditions. We must show that land in community hands is better for society and Mother Earth than land which is at the mercy of capital.

*La Via Campesina*

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## who we are

In the last years hundreds of organisations and movements have been engaged in struggles, activities, and various kinds of work to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organisations were present in the *International Nyéléni Forum 2007* and feel part of a broader **Food Sovereignty Movement**, that considers the Nyéléni 2007 declaration as its political platform. **The Nyéléni Newsletter wants to be the voice of this international movement.**

Organisations involved: Development Fund, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Food First, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, Grassroots International, IPC for food sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, Oxfam Solidarity, Real World Radio, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, TNI, VSF-Justicia Alimentaria Global, WhyHunger.

**now is time for food sovereignty!**

## Classic Land Reform vs...

In the past, land reforms were won in numerous countries because large estates were seen as growth-inhibitors and unproductive. Landowners focused their efforts on high production and low investment and generally failed to use even half of the land they held. This was obviously unjust: a select few had vast swathes of underworked land while millions of families were deprived of any at all.

Class alliances were forged between peasant farmers and domestic industrial capital, a process that bolstered land reform. It meant that peasant farmers

made corporate-held, unproductive land productive again and so contributed to domestic economic growth.



These land reforms were fragmented and put peasant farmers' interests above those of shepherds, forest peoples and other rural inhabitants.

They were partial and inadequate reforms and, what is more, today's conditions have rendered the alliances those reforms had once hinged on unviable. The reason is that financial capital is turning unproductive big farms into agribusiness and mining operations, which means there is longer a capitalist justification for land reforms as a means to achieve growth.

**one does not sell  
the earth  
upon which  
the people walk**

Tashunka Witko, 1840 –1877

## Marabá Declaration<sup>1</sup>

*International Conference of Agrarian Reform  
Marabá, Pará, Brasil, 13- 17 April 2016*

There are ever more cases of land-, forest- and water-grabbing, attacks against democracy and popular will, political prisoners, etc. in Latin America, Asia Africa, Europe and North America. In the current historical period, we are witnessing the emergence of an alliance between financial capital, transnational corporations, imperialism, broad sectors within national states (almost without regard to their purported ideology), particularly but not only judicial and public security institutions, the private sectors in industrial agriculture, fishing and food (including agribusiness and aquaculture), mining, construction, forestry and other extractive sectors, and the mainstream media. The members of this new alliance are promoting an avalanche of privatizations, grabbing and taking over the commons and public goods, such as land, water resources, forests, seeds, cattle raising, fisheries, glaciers and entire territories. In order to achieve their goals, they are using financialization to convert everything into commodities, free trade and investment agreements, the corruption of our politicians and leaders, control of the mass media and financial system, and mergers and acquisitions of companies.

The offensive of Capital is threatening rural life and our entire society, including our health, Mother Earth, the climate, biodiversity, and our peoples and cultures. Mass migration, the destruction of the social fabric of our communities, urban sprawl, insecurity, agrochemicals, GMOs, junk food, the homogenization of diets, global warming, the destruction of mangrove forests, the acidification of the sea, the depletion of fish stocks, and the loss of anything that resembles democracy, are all symptoms of what is taking place.

Any resistance by rural peoples is demonized by the mainstream media, as organizations, their leaders and supporters face repression, criminalization, persecution, assassinations, enforced disappearances, illegitimate jailing, administrative detentions, sexual harassment and rape. Laws are being changed to criminalize peasant and working class struggles even more, as well as granting total impunity to perpetrators of crimes against peasants, workers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples and all rights defenders.

We ask, which is better? Do we want a countryside without peasants, trees or biodiversity? Do we want a countryside full of monocultures and feedlots, agrochemicals and GMOs, producing exports and junk food, causing climate change and undermining the adaptive capacity of communities? Do we want pollution, illness, and massive migration to cities? Or do we want a countryside made up of the food producing territories of peasants, indigenous peoples, family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, and other rural peoples, based on human dignity and diverse knowledges and cosmovisions, with trees, biodiversity, and the agroecological production of healthy food, which cool the planet, produce food sovereignty and take care of Mother Earth?

In this sense, we consider the proposal of our Brazilian comrades for a Popular Agrarian Reform, an agrarian reform not only for landless peasants, but for all of the working classes and for all of society. This agroecological and territorial approach to agrarian reform can only be won through class struggle and direct confrontation of the project of Capital, including its profits, media outlets and its national and international agents. This is an agrarian reform to maximize the potential of peasant agriculture, economy and territory.

Throughout the Americas, Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, our organizations, movements and convergences are putting forth similar proposals and territorial approaches in their dispute with the global project of Capital. These include the convergence among our diverse popular and traditional knowledges and ways of knowing the world in agroecology, artisanal fishing, traditional herding, and in our diverse strategies and ways of life. Our proposals, though similar, differ based on the nature of our different realities. In places where land is concentrated in few hands, we struggle for its redistribution.

1 - Full version available at: <http://www.viacampesina.org/en/index.php/actions-and-events-mainmenu-26/17-april--day-of-peasants-struggle-mainmenu-33/2041-international-conference-of-agrarian-reform-declaration-of-maraba1>



In some countries, we speak of an “agrarian revolution.” In places where our peoples still hold onto their lands and territories, we struggle to defend those territories, and prevent land and water grabbing. Meanwhile, in places where land was nationalized and is now being conceded to foreign entities by governments, we struggle for the return of ancestral land rights to our communities. The fisherfolk among us speak of the struggle for the recovery and defence of artisanal fishing territories. In Europe we have once again taken up the strategy of land occupations, and organized struggles against land use changes, making clear to all that the problems of land grabbing and concentration are also a growing problem in Northern countries. In Palestine we struggle against a brutal occupation and we call to boycott Israeli products. And everywhere, there are burning struggles by young people to access land and other resources.

We have achieved great victories, such as the massive agrarian reform carried out after peoples’ land occupations and recuperations in Zimbabwe, the “Education for and by the Countryside” policy in Brazil, the cancellations of mining concessions and plantations in many parts of Africa and Asia, and the permanence of Cuba’s agrarian reform and its successful “peasant-to-peasant” agroecology movement. We also have partial but promising victories, such as the possibility of a large scale agrarian reform in Indonesia, for which we must mobilize in order to make our governments follow through on their promises.

## Our challenges

- We will transform the struggle for land into the struggle for territory, along with developing a new productive model for food sovereignty, based on a more “independent” agroecology by using our own local resources and inputs and recovering our ancestral knowledges.
- We will organize the struggle for public policies supporting peasant and small farmer production as well as health, education, culture and sports in our communities.
- We will carry out our political and ideological training on a mass scale, fortify our work with our membership and our work with the masses, in order to improve the internal structure and operation of our organizations, and progressively integrate the leadership and participation of woman and youth.
- We will confront the ways by which the mass media demonize our movements and promote the culture of consumption and the hollowing out of democracy. We will work hard to build our own media, which foster dialogues with our membership as well as with the working class and the entire society.
- We will oppose more effectively the criminalization and repression of our movements as well as militarization, and organize an international struggle in support of our political prisoners. We will organize an ongoing solidarity campaign that will be based on the principle of sharing what we have rather than on sharing only what we don’t need.
- We will continue to carry out our permanent task of building class alliances, without dependencies, between the country and the city, between food producers and consumers, and with progressive researchers, academics and support organisations that share our vision.
- We will denounce and oppose so-called “anti-terrorist” laws and their use against our legitimate struggles.
- We will oppose the institutional tendency (for example by the World Bank, FAO, and some academia and NGOs) to try to dilute the content of concepts such as “agrarian reform” and “agroecology”, by launching “light” versions of these concepts, as in “access to land”, “corporate social responsibility” and “industrial organic” food production in monocultures, with the objective of green-washing agribusiness.
- We will struggle to achieve international mechanisms to defend and support our visions and strategies that are not “voluntary” but rather compulsory and actionable.
- We will strengthen the participation of women and youth in our social movements. We will develop mechanisms to increase the number of youth who remain in the countryside. We will struggle against the dominant model of patriarchy in the capitalist system, and demand the full rights of peasant and indigenous women to land, water and territory.

## Box 2

### ...Popular Land Reform

If classic land reform was inadequate and is no longer feasible, a new call must be launched: for “Popular Land Reform”.

This would mean peasant farmers, indigenous peoples, shepherds, fishermen and other rural communities all striving for community control over land, where healthy food is produced in harmony with nature, harnessing agroecology and tapping into long-standing popular learning and practices.

This sort of land reform requires its own class alliances, though not with capitalist domestic sectors. Rather, the alliances must be forged between rural and urban communities. For that to happen, we must use environmentally sustainable production. We must show that community-run, food-conscious and environmentally-sound land use is better for society and Mother Earth than land use ruled by capital.

Community-run land is a way to ensure lives with dignity, healthy food production, respect for natural resources like soil, water, forests and biodiversity. Moreover, it is a step towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Vast monocrops, open-air mines, pesticides, GMOs, toxic waste, misery, migration and global warming are the hallmarks of land managed by capital.



# voices from the field

## The struggle for the planet is part of peoples' daily struggle for life

1

María Everarda, Guatemala, CONAVIGUA

My name is María Everarda de León. I am 42 years old and was born in a town called Maya Achí. I work with the national coordinating committee for the widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA), a part of La Vía Campesina. We don't own land. Instead, we rent plots where we sow beans, maize and vegetables. Today, climate change has made production very difficult. We believe this results from the destruction of our mother earth. Since 2000, even basic grain production has been riddled with problems. The yield of the land has plummeted, riverbeds are dry and hydroelectric dams have destroyed our hillsides.

The struggle for the planet is part of peoples' daily struggle for life; for capitalists it is just another commodity. Land is increasingly concentrated, estates ever-more massive. We want comprehensive land reform that is principled and value-based. It must be inclusive, and not only ensure Food Sovereignty but also the survival of communities. I have two children. Things are very tough for kids today. I believe that women's struggles have given recent generations the possibility of a decent life. They have made possible the prospect of a fulfilling rural existence, in tune with mother earth.



## Agrarian reform is in the hand of the youth

2

Zainal Fuad, Indonesia, SPI

My name is Zainal Fuad. My family is in East Java. We produce cassava, corn and peanuts. I am on the national board of the Indonesian Peasant Union (SPI) – also part of La Vía Campesina in East and South east Asia.

In Indonesia, in the pre-independence era, millions of acres of land were grabbed by the Dutch. Even though after our Independence land was nationalized through the agrarian reforms initiated in the 60s, it was a failure because of the wave of capitalism that swept through, pushed aggressively by corporations and the State. This continues even now.

SPI is pushing agrarian reform by occupying the land! We have targeted the occupation of 1 million hectares of land by 2019, while also pushing the government to distribute about 9 million hectares of land. This is important for our peasants whose lands are very small or are landless. We need land in order to build a livelihood. On occupied land, we produce through agroecological methods and distribute through our cooperatives. Mobilizing young people and keeping them on the land is a huge challenge. We have taken up that challenge because we believe that the dream of agrarian reform is in the hands of the youth!

## We still share a special relationship with our land

3

Themba Chauke, South Africa, LPM

I am Themba Chauke, with the Landless People's movement from South Africa. In South Africa, we are currently faced with one of the worst droughts in memory caused by El Nino, which is pushing the price of food higher and higher. The government must urgently implement Agrarian Reform, using a form of agriculture that people can understand. We call this agriculture peasant agriculture or agroecology. In this, we do not use agro-chemical inputs – instead we use what we have, the seeds that we have. My family comes from the region that is now known as the Kruger National Park. They were evicted from this land during the apartheid era, in the 60s. But we still share a special relationship with our land and go there to conduct our rituals. While growing up, I would often go to the field to see what my community was doing in the farms – to help and to learn. That is how I learnt about farming. I even tell my young daughter, who is 11 years old, that she has to respect this form of agriculture and that she should always support small scale farmers. Through the network of La Vía Campesina, peasants learn from each other about new techniques of agroecology, which is very important in the current context.

## Be a peasant is to be proud

4

Attila Szocs, Romania, Eco Ruralis

I am Attila Szocs, a seed producer from Romania and I come from a peasant organization called Eco Ruralis. I produce peasant seeds and distribute them in our network. We have a collective farm together with Eco Ruralis members near our headquarters where we do this. At the International Conference on Agrarian Reform I was glad to witness the work of MST and their ideas on land management. Agrarian reform is urgently needed in Europe and Eastern Europe.

In Romania, three peasants disappear every hour and the country is turning towards agro-industry. It is important to keep the peasants on the land and also to ensure that our youth are excited about agriculture. Agrarian reform presents an alternative. We need this concept to produce agroecologically and the only people who can do this in Romanian society are Romanian Peasants. It is also important for La Vía Campesina to be present in Romania. The energy and enthusiasm of the movement is an inspiration and it is important for our members to see this energy and to know that to be a peasant is to be proud.

## Box 3 West Africa Caravan for Land, Water and Seeds

Over 400 representatives from 15 African countries<sup>1</sup> took part in a Caravan that trekked and traversed three West African countries (Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal), challenging the large grabbing of peasant land, water and territories by international agribusinesses.

The caravan was first mooted at the 2014 African Social Forum in Dakar, to denounce land grabbing. This dialogue continued at World Social Forum in Tunis, in March 2015, leading to the creation of a Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles<sup>2</sup> by several organizations from 11 West African countries in June 2015.

The caravan sought to raise awareness and mobilize communities to advance the struggles for the right to food, land, water and peasant seeds and challenge decision on the commitments made by authorities in land and agricultural development by adhering to conventions, regional mechanisms and international guidelines.

Starting in Burkina Faso on the 3rd of March the caravan moved to Mali and ended in Dakar, Senegal on the 19th. During the 2,300km journey, over 17 days with about 3 stopovers per country, the caravan gathered farmers' concerns, learnt about issues related to access to land, water and preservation of peasant seeds, and also met political and administrative leaders. Throughout the journey, the caravan witnessed several cases of violations of peasant rights, most involving land grabs facilitated by governments and driven by the Bretton Woods institutions.

Banners and placards aptly conveyed the messages "halt to the project jatropha, stops the silence and indifference of the authorities", "food sovereignty = sovereignty of peoples", "Earth, water and farmer s' seed is my life"... "don't touch my land, my land is my life".

Ibrahim Coulibaly of ROPPA said, "Every day we come across peasants dispossessed of their lands. Local elected officials and heads of villages ... making corrupt deals with agro industries and eventually prevent access of people to water, seeds. These projects are a death knell to our region".

Land and water are common goods, not commodities and are our common heritage, should be secured, preserved and governed by each community for the common good of all. In West Africa, over 70% of the population depend on peasant agriculture that feeds about 80% of the region's population. Secure access and control over land, water, forests, fisheries and seeds are therefore vital for communities and must be protected and enforced as rights.

On March 8th, rural women across West Africa also took a stand for their Land Rights. They lack adequate and secure access to land and financial support and are the first victims of land and related natural resources grabbing.

The caravan more importantly strengthened the building of a strong movement struggling for the peoples' rights based on food sovereignty.

On the last day, in Dakar, the green book of the convergence, a synthesis that listed both the demands and proposals regarding land, water and seeds was handed over to the President of Senegal Macky Sall, Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

*Read more about the caravan [www.caravaneterreeau.info](http://www.caravaneterreeau.info)*

1- Niger, Nigeria, Togo and Benin joined the Caravan in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. Ghana joined in Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso. Côte d'Ivoire joined in Sikasso in Mali, Mauritania in Rosso north of Senegal, Guinea Conakry in Tambacounda (Senegal). Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Léone joined in Kaolack.  
2 - In West Africa comprise more than 300 organizations and networks representing victims of land and water grabbing in rural, peri-urban and urban areas; evictees of popular districts; youth; women and; NGOs from 15 countries of ECOWAS and the West African Economic and Monetary Union.

## Box 4 An emblematic fight for the land: ZAD

In Europe, the term "agrarian reform" is seldom used. It is true that some voices speak up regarding young people's access to land, rights to use the land and collective rights in contrast to private property. Nevertheless, the strategy isn't one of mass mobilizations by occupying land and demanding land redistribution, as in Brazil or Honduras. As such, those opposing the airport project at Notre Dame des Landes, a few miles from Nantes, in France, stand out. It is a true fight for land, one which goes much beyond the classic "not in my backyard".

In 1974, a 1200 hectare area was delineated and named ZAD by those sustaining the airport project. For them is stood for "Deferred Construction Zone"<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, a protection association, involving farmers alarmed by the project was created. In 40 years, the project kept evolving. Today, the association is an international scale economic platform extending from Nantes to Saint-Nazaire. Those opposing the project replaced the acronym's meaning to "Area to Protect"<sup>2</sup>. Sixty residences (collectively occupied houses, cabins, trailers and other dwellings) have been brought to light and hundreds of hectares of land have been reclaimed from the private company in charge of the project. The land is now used for farming (market gardening plots, pastures, cereal crops, etc.). Today, ZAD is a place of several experiments, a place to learn to live together, to cultivate the land, to be more autonomous, and it is known across several countries in Europe. In France, there are many local support groups who are ready to mobilize in case of an impending eviction of the "zadistes"<sup>3</sup>.

In the autumn of 2015, in spite of the appeal of the European Commission which states that no work must be undertaken before a satisfactory answer is given by France regarding the environmental compensation measures which will be taken, the French prime-minister once again stated his desire to complete the project. On the one hand, during the COP21, French diplomacy was priding itself on leading noteworthy negotiations in order to obtain a pledge from all the countries in the world to lower their CO2 emissions; on the other, it re-started eviction proceedings of the remaining inhabitants and farmers in the ZAD. Consequently, at the beginning of 2016, strong citizens' movements took place in Nantes and in several other cities in France. The government therefore announced that a referendum will be held. It was soon renamed a "consultation" and was geographically limited to only one French department, Loire-Atlantique.

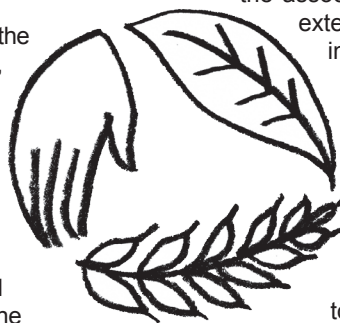
Currently, the Committee of the opposing parties (over 50 groups- associations, communities, unions and political movements) decrying this charade of a democracy, appealed to the citizens for them to massively attend the polls and vote NO in order to not give leeway to the project managers. Such a consultation cannot by itself legitimize a disastrous airport project which would damage nourishing lands and wetland areas of great biological richness.

In December 2015, about 40 peasants from La Via Campesina went to ZAD to give their support for this symbolic struggle for the land. We hope the consultation in the coming weeks is only one more step in this long fight to completely stop this useless cementing project; one more step so that in Europe, as everywhere else in the world, the awareness of the importance of the land in producing our food continues to spread.

1 - "Zone d'Aménagement Différé"

2 - "Zone À Défendre"

3 - Name given to the residents of the ZAD





*« In our world-views, we are being who come from the Earth, from the water and from corn. The Lenca people are ancestral guardians of the rivers, in turn protected by the spirits of young girls, who teach us that giving our lives in various ways for the protection of the rivers is giving our lives for the well-being of humanity and of this planet. (...)*

*Let us wake up ! Let us wake up, humankind! We are out of time. We must shake our conscience free of the rapacious capitalism, racism and patriarchy that will only assure our own self-destruction. »*

**Berta Cáceres**

Woman leader from the indigenous rights organisation COPINH in Honduras, assassinated on March 3, 2016 for her struggle in the defense of her people, their territory and water.



## to read, listen, watch and share

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