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Food and Agriculture Organisation Conference

More Free Trade, More Hunger

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The high level summit of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (the FAO) held in Rome on Food Security ended on June 5th. The conclusions of the gathering do not indicate a change in the policy trends which have been in force these last years and which have led to the current situation. The declarations of good intentions made by various governments and the promises of millions of euros to end hunger in the world are not capable of ending the structural causes that have generated this crisis.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/worldfoodcrisis.jpg>]

On the contrary, the proposals made by the general secretary of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon, to increase food production by 50% and to eliminate the export limits imposed by some of the countries affected, only reinforces the root causes of this crisis rather than addressing and guaranteeing the food security of the majority of the people in the global South.

The monopoly of certain multinational corporations in each one of the links in the chain of food production, from seeds to fertilizers to marketing and distribution of what we eat, is something that was not dealt with during this summit. However, despite the crisis, the principle seed companies, Monsanto, DuPont and Syngenta, have realized a growing increase in profits as have the principle chemical fertilizer corporations. The largest food processing companies such as Nestle and Unilever have also announced an increase in benefits, though less large than those who control the first rungs in the food system ladder. In the same way the large distributors of food such as Wal-Mart, Tesco and Carrefour have confirmed that their profits continue to rise.

The results of the FAO summit reflect the consensus reached among the UN, the World Bank (WB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to maintain economic and trade policies of South-North dependency and to support the agribusiness transnationals. The recommendations promoted in favor of a greater opening of the markets of the South, to subsidize food imports as part of development aid, and betting on a new green revolution all point in this direction.

Excluded from the debate were those who work and care for the land, the hands with whom our food policies ought to be placed, the men and women family farmers. When representatives of farmer organizations tried to present their proposals at the official inauguration of the summit, they were removed by force. In high level meetings that preceded this one, a greater participation of social collectives was permitted, whereas now, before the gravity of the situation, the doors were kept closed, a fact that has been denounced by the international network of the Via Campesina.

A resolution of the crisis situation implies putting an end to the current agricultural model and food system which puts the interests of the large transnational corporations ahead of the food needs of millions of people. Is it necessary to deal with the structural causes; the neo-liberal policies that have been systematically applied in the last 30 years, promoted by the WB, the IMF and the World Trade Organization (WTO), with the U.S. and the European Union in front. Some policies have meant an economic liberalization on a global scale, the unrestrained opening of markets, and the privatization of lands dedicated to local supply and a conversion of that land to export monocultures, which have all led us to the grave situation of food insecurity at the present time. According to the WB it is calculated that 850 million people have been suffering hunger (prior to the "crisis") and that an additional 100 million will be added to this group due to the crisis.

The way out of this crisis requires the regulating and controlling of the market and of international trade; rebuilding national economies; returning control of food production to the family farmers and guaranteeing their access to land,

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seeds and water; getting agriculture out of the free trade agreements and the WTO; and putting an end to the speculation on hunger.

The market cannot solve this problem. To counter the declarations of the number 2 at the FAO, José MarÃ-a Sumpsi, who affirmed that this is an issue of supply and demand due to the rise in consumption in emerging countries such as Indian, China and Brazil, we must remember that never before has there been a more bountiful harvest in the world.

Today humanity produces three times what was produced in the 1960s, while the population has only doubled. There is no production crisis in agriculture, but the impossibility of accessing food by large populations who cannot pay current prices. The solution cannot be more free trade because, as has been demonstrated, more free trade implies more hunger and less access to food. We do not want to throw more fuel on the fire.

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