SEMINAR DECLARATION by PARTNERS of ENTRAIDE ET FRATERNITE

AT THE JACQUES BREL YOUTH HOSTEL, BRUSSELS, APRIL 2015

“No family without a roof, no peasant farmer without land, no worker without rights” Pope Francis

We, the delegates at the seminar of international partners of Entraide et Fraternité involved in a programme to fight for food sovereignty supported by the Belgian Development Cooperation (DGD); natives of Africa, Central America, South America, Asia and the Caribbean, working with families and peasant communities from our countries, are gathered in Brussels to share our experiences and consolidate our common initiatives to demand rights to improve the quality of life of communities.

The world’s families and peasant communities are confronted with problems such as poverty caused by such structural issues as:

- The prevailing capitalist system is a source of exclusion and promotes individualism, personal enrichment, corruption, paternalism, exacerbates the effects of climate change and (negative) environmental conditions, and destroys community dynamics and ways of life, thus endangering the subsistence capacity of future generations.
- The farming and agro-industrial food system does not respond to the population’s need for sufficient healthy and quality food. Indeed, it promotes the standardisation and commercialization of food, consumerism, the looting and exploitation of natural resources and promotes disintegration of the rural population and the upsetting of community organization and social movements.

There is a lack of political will to initiate and improve the effectiveness of implementing laws and government policies to protect the territory and initiatives of peasant communities and the civil society. The criminalisation of social movements is an example.

We are happy to see important advances in the peasant communities and organizations involved in cooperative programmes in the following areas:

a) Production and commercialisation:

- Families are adopting and developing new agro-ecological practices and techniques in the process of food production to reduce environmental costs and impacts, and increase resilience to climate change.
- Families are conserving and safeguarding local biodiversity (such as seeding and rice).
- Diversified and healthy production systems are developing that contribute to food safety sovereignty and nutrition.
- Men and women farmers are advancing in setting up tools for commercialisation such as local markets and cooperatives, using the social and solidarity economy as a guiding principle.
b) Organisation and political activity:

- Through their grassroots organizations, peasant farmers are involving other allies in defending rights and highlighting legislative proposals for food sovereignty through networks, organizing, and relationships.
- There is a strengthening of grassroots groups and social movements both formal and informal such as associations, women’s groups and their relationships with local authorities.
- Families understand and are implementing food sovereignty.

c) Rights:

- Men and women farmers are improving their knowledge and protection of civil, political, economic, environmental and cultural rights.
- Women are gaining and demanding social, economic, and political participation in their communities and grassroots organizations.

We have shared the principal community expectations:

- Increase food security and sovereignty with an agro-ecological approach and solidarity economy practices which involve the best opportunities for land access and means of production; improve the image of peasant labour, particularly for youth and women; create self-employment and rural micro-enterprises.
- Build a concept of the peasant farming community based on strengthening equity and gender equality, safeguard the culture and protection of social rights, question public policies and the capacity for policy proposals and advocate for an integrated agrarian reform.
- Provide support against the effects of climate change with agro-ecological practices, recover ancestral knowledge, raise awareness and advocate for environmental protection and the responsible use of means of livelihood (land, water and human capital), increase resilience and resistance in the territories\(^1\) in the face of predation by multinationals who are trying to monopolize natural resources.
- Promote access to spaces for reflection through community communication, universities, schools, churches, public and private community organizations as elements for awareness and education to promote culture, food security, protection of the elements of life, the exchange of experiences and relationships of a solidarity economy.

Facing current challenges and taking into account the advances made in the peasant communities, we continue to believe that a just world is possible in a society offering equal conditions and opportunities based in particular on peasant family farming and agro-ecology. For this, it is necessary to fight against the prevailing neo-liberal system starting with promoting the right to food, food sovereignty, a solidarity economy and gender equality.

We are working together, driven by the strength of solidarity and cooperation.

1) We are continuing to build sustainable partnerships between the actors in the south and north to:

\(^1\) Territory = the defense of the territory is the action to collectively defend the human rights that support the life and generate wellness. This process starts from the communities where the rural families' lives, in front of the processes of land grabbing and overexploitation due to nationals and foreigners farming systems based on agro-industrial model. These forms of exploitations are introduced into the trade of the natural resources deteriorating the ecosystems of the communities (pollution, deforestation, irrational use of the resource “soil” and the replacement of indigenous seeds by the genetically modified ones, exploitation of mines and megaprojects).
• Be able to learn with communities and grassroots groups and support their struggles.
• Attack the structural causes not only the effects of injustice and inequality, and ensure that our activities move in this direction.
• Create spaces for exchange and a chain of solidarity among ourselves by knowing our different realities, and by identifying that which unites us despite our differences in order to increase mutual confidence and strength based on common values and commitments.
• Promote south-south and south-north synergies by supporting and building on the specific capacities of each organization.
• Develop this solidarity over time, while noting indicators of the steps taken because our partnership goes beyond specific jointly carried out programmes.
• Help diversify our sources of funding and increase and strengthen our networks.
• Develop mechanisms for protecting leaders and activists whose activities are criminalised.
• Improve our links and joint advocacy with networks and institutions, among them, Via Campesina, FIMARC, le MIJARC and churches.

2) Based on partnerships and strengthened by our experiences in the preceding programmes, we have established a basis for the programme that we wish to develop for the years 2017-2021, with support from the Belgian Development Corporation. Namely:
• Build this programme taking into account community opinions and expectations.
• Organize work in the south and north by setting up joint strategies and activities, particularly in advocacy for land rights and by creating a strategic group for this purpose.
• Exchange and build experiences, enhancing elements of previous programmes and learning from other countries. We are asking EF to commit to creating a mechanism for these exchanges.
• Work on communication for improving the status of peasant farming and alternative practices, particularly mass communication and communication destined for youth.
• Above all, improve family peasant farming and agro-ecology with priority on youth and women by developing sustainable farming techniques and initiatives for a solidarity economy; supporting the production, transformation and commercialisation of healthy food; through our commitment to defending land rights and integral agrarian reform; by promoting gender equality and demanding public policies that support family farming and food sovereignty; through the pursuit of strengthening capacities and respecting traditional cultural practices; by strengthening resilience in the face of climate change; by encouraging solidarity between consumers and producers.

In conclusion, we at Entraide et Fraternité, together with our partners and the peasant communities, reaffirm our commitment to building networks, and continuing the fight for food sovereignty and a solidarity Economy. We invite other organizations with the same objectives, the civil society, the governments of our countries and the Belgian Development Cooperation to join us and support this fight.

Brussels, April 30, 2015

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2 FIMARC = International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements
3 MIJARC = International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth