

HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND BIO-ENERGY Rome, Italy, June 3-5

WHY THE CONFERENCE?

Representatives from some 180 countries attended the Rome summit. With food prices going through the roof and widespread political and social unrest due to hunger and the effects of climate change being felt in many parts of the world, there was a pressing need for world leaders to come together and address the current crisis.

THE ISSUES

The following three factors were identified as key issues throughout the conference. These are intricately inter-linked and do not stand alone.

THE RISE IN FOOD PRICES

The hike in world food prices – which is affecting nearly all major food and feed commodities – has multiple causes, including:

- Weather-related production shortfalls
- Reduced stock levels due to:
 - Demand growth outstripping supply
 - Policy changes introduced in the Uruguay round of trade agreements
- Increasing fuel costs
- Competition between biofuels and agricultural commodities
- Short-term policy actions and exchange rate swings, notably the depreciation in the \$USD
- Operations on financial markets, with derivative markets being a magnet for speculators looking to spread their risk and pursue more lucrative returns.

THE GIVING OVER OF AGRICULTURAL LAND TO THE PRODUCTION OF BIOENERGY

Production of biofuels is a highly disputed matter.

Some people highlight the impact of biofuels on food prices and argue against the use of food crops for bioenergy production. Others note that not all types of biofuels have negative impacts, and that some can be produced sustainably, especially if international

guidelines for sustainable production are developed.

Various conference participants called for the elimination of subsidies underlying biofuel production.

Others urged research into second-generation biofuels – i.e. those produced from woody and grass biomass. However, Pat Mooney from the Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration, said even second-generation crops will eventually displace food crops, calling this “morally unacceptable”.

THE THREAT THAT CLIMATE CHANGE POSES TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

In the long term, climate change may prove to be a more important threat to food security than all other threats combined. Participants at a round-table meeting on climate-change adaptation and mitigation discussed sustainable forest and water resource management, land degradation, fisheries and economic growth. Some participants stressed the importance of empowering small-scale farmers, South-South cooperation, and the development of local agriculture and industries.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS:

- Respond urgently to requests for assistance from affected countries
- Give immediate support for agricultural production and trade

MEDIUM- AND LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS:

- An increase in investment in agriculture
- Investment in science and technology for food and agriculture
- The establishment of systems that positively contribute to the mitigation of climate change and food security
- Further dialogue on biofuels
- Further liberalisation of trade in agriculture

ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

"Governments, multilateral agencies and financial institutions are offering proposals that will only deepen these crises through more dangerous versions of policies that originally triggered the current situation." — Terra Preta, "Forum on the Food Crisis, Climate Change, Agrofuels and Food Sovereignty," a civil society forum held parallel to the FAO High Level Conference, in which more than 100 organisations from 5 continents participated.

At a Terra Preta press conference during the FAO conference, delegates called for justice for the victims of the food crisis, as agro-business (which sells fertilisers, pesticides and GMO seeds etc.) is making a huge profit, as are individual speculators on the financial markets who are taking advantage of rising food prices.

ACCORDING TO THIS CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM, THE ROAD TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY LIES IN:

- Helping small-scale farmers and fisherfolk, including organic farmers, become the foundation of food provision;
- Resisting the corporate control of food and agriculture, including combating financial speculation on food;
- Promoting agrarian reform in order to protect the land, water, biodiversity and knowledge of the people, while protecting the rights of women, recognising that they are in the forefront of food production;
- Organising against the production of agro-fuels as promoted and controlled by the corporate sector.

Although some producers may be benefiting from the sharp rise in food prices and, in the long-run, most producers, including the rural poor, could benefit if the crisis is successfully managed, for the moment it is the urban poor with no access to the means of production who are bearing the brunt.

This fact sheet was prepared by Solen Gratiet and Myra Margolin

For more information, contact:

Susila Dharma International
777 rue Campbell
Greenfield Park (Montréal), J4V 1Y3
Canada

Tel: 1-450-761-0592
E-mail : info@susiladharma.org