

La Via Campesina press conference

Bolivia: Peasants advancing agricultural solutions to climate change

April 21 2010

(Cochabamba, April 21 2010) The international peasant movement La Via Campesina held a press conference on April 21 at the Peoples' World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth. The Peoples' Conference is being held from April 19 thru 22, and was organized by the Bolivian government in order to build an agenda to combat climate change.

La Via Campesina has a delegation of 300 peasants from 20 countries at the conference, who are there to present sustainable, peasant agriculture as a solution to halt climate change. According to Henry Saragih, General Coordinator of La Via Campesina who is a peasant from the Indonesian Peasant Union, La Via Campesina has been following the issue of climate change since December 2007 at the UN climate talks in Bali. "The governments are not implementing real solutions to this crisis," said Saragih. "La Via Campesina rejects the false solutions to climate change being proposed by most governments, and demands a change in the economic system."

As a comprehensive solution to climate change, La Via Campesina proposes a shift from the model of food production based on industrial agriculture to one based on sustainable, peasant agriculture. When agricultural production, land use changes, processing, packaging, transport, as well as the decomposition of organic waste are all accounted for, industrial agriculture contributes about one-half of greenhouse gas emissions, and is the single biggest cause of global warming.

Saragih cited La Via Campesina's document *Ten agricultural policies to stop climate change* which include: 1) support sustainable agriculture; 2) reduce the use of agrochemicals; 3) develop local agriculture systems; 4) protect biodiversity; 5) decentralize energy production; 6) stop plantations of monoculture crops; 7) implement genuine agrarian reform; 8) stop industrial livestock production; 9) support local, fresh, minimally-processed foods; and 10) stop deforestation.

Josie Riffaud, a peasant from the "Confederation Paysanne" in France and a member of La Via Campesina's international coordinating committee, reaffirmed that La Via Campesina rejects false solutions to climate change such as the carbon credit market, agrofuels and genetically-modified crops. "These are technical solutions, and they are false solutions. La Via Campesina proposes that the solution to climate change lies with sustainable, peasant agriculture," said Riffaud.

"We peasants are important to the world because small farmers feed 50 percent of humanity," said Alberto Gomez, a peasant from the National Union of Regional Autonomous Peasant Organizations in Mexico, who is also an international coordinator of La Via Campesina. "When you take into account small-scale urban food producers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and hunters and gatherers, peasants are responsible for 70 percent of global food production."

"La Via Campesina welcomes the effort by Bolivian President Evo Morales to organize this conference. We are very happy to be here because this is not a technocratic conference. There is strong participation by many diverse people," affirmed Riffaud. "The result of this conference will be a declaration that will be presented at the next UN climate talks. This will be the first time that people around the world will arrive at the UN talks with a well-elaborated, alternative proposal. In Copenhagen we said 'change the system, not the climate'; here in Cochabamba we are elaborating solutions and proposing concrete measures that will be presented in Cancun, Mexico in December."