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Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform

EMERGENCY NETWORK

1005ACFS

23/08/2010

BAN LAND GRABBING!

The new land grabbing is the latest element in a transnational business strategy of trying to get the hands on people's lands and water resources. Land grabbing violates international human rights law – not so much because in the course of people's displacement numerous human rights standards are most likely violated, but because peasant farmers' possibilities to feed themselves now and in the future are foreclosed.

The agenda of the upcoming session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on 11-14 October, 2010, includes a policy roundtable on land tenure and international investment in agriculture. This will be one of the most relevant sessions in the sense that it will show if the reformed CFS can effectively deliver international policy responses to one of the most pressing issues of our times: how to protect the lands of rural communities from encroachment. Please send a letter to the ministry in your country representing your government in FAO (usually the ministry of agriculture) with copy to the ambassador of your country in FAO requesting them to ban land grabbing.

Background:

Land grabbing has already started to intensify in many countries over the past 10-15 years with the adoption of deregulation policies, trade and investment agreements, and market oriented governance reforms. The recent food and financial crises have provided the impetus for a surge in land grabbing by governments and financial investors trying to secure agricultural production capacity and future food supplies as well as assets that are sure to fetch high returns. Corporations are seeking long term economic concessions for plantation agriculture to produce agro-fuels, rubber, oils, food etc. These trends are also visible in coastal areas, where land, marine resources and water bodies are being sold, leased, or developed for tourism to corporate investors and local elites, at the expense of artisanal fishers and coastal communities. One way or the other, agricultural lands and forests are being diverted away from peasants, fishers and pastoralists for commercial purposes leading to displacement, hunger and poverty.

The CFS round-table mentioned above will concretely discuss two international policy initiatives addressing the issues of governance of tenure and international investment in agriculture from the point of view of food security: the FAO Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Land and Natural Resources Tenure and the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture (RAI).

FIAN, La Via Campesina, LRRAN and others have rejected RAI: They were essentially proposed by the World Bank in order to address and diffuse the wide-spread criticism of the new land grabbing with a non-binding statement – while at the same time continuing to promote its land grabbing policies.

In contrast, the FAO Guidelines entail the opportunity to develop a systematic and comprehensive interpretation of existing international human rights and environmental law provisions protecting the rights to land and natural resources of all rural constituencies. Social movements and other CSO have been actively involved in the process of the Guidelines. In the last decades, agenda setting and decision making related to land and natural resources were heavily influenced by International Financial Institutions, with disastrous consequences. FAO as a multilateral exchange forum and specialized UN agency with a mandate to work on normative issues related to food and agriculture and the current process of reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) offers a more democratic arena to achieve a policy change and a multilateral agreement on land and natural resources governance - including the need to ban land grabbing. The Guidelines need to be drafted, negotiated and adopted as an intergovernmental process in order to ensure the highest level of political commitment. Decisions about modalities of drafting and adoption will be made during the upcoming CFS session.

The mandate of the Emergency Network:

With land grabbing the globalisation paradigm has reached the basic resources of the primary sector of national economies, resources which are absolutely essential for countries' and peoples' self-determination and food sovereignty. Land grabbing fits well in a strategy towards deepening the commoditization of nature, agriculture and the global rule of a small group of "investors" and their TNCs. The corporate food regime is undermining in a systemic way the realization of the right to adequate food of peasants in food insecure countries, and of all of us, too. An equitable access to land and resources as a precondition for a decentralized, sustainable and autonomous peasant agriculture need to be defended as a crucial component of the right to adequate food.

Deadline: 16/10/2010

Adresses:

Please look for the address of the ministry of agriculture in your country	Copies to: The ambassador of your country in FAO	
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Please inform FIAN about any response to your letters.

Dear Mr/Ms XX

The FAO estimates that in the last three years 20 million hectares have been acquired by foreign interests in Africa only. A global process is underway whereby powerful foreign private and public investors conclude agreements with states for taking possession of and/or controlling large surfaces of land (many involving more than 10,000 hectares and several more than 500,000 hectares), which are relevant for current and/or future food security of the host country.

Land grabbing has already picked up in the past 10 years as a consequence of excessive deregulation policies. The recent food, agrofuels and financial crises have provided the impetus for a surge in land grabbing by corporations, financial investors and a few governments trying to secure land resources as assets to fetch high returns. Corporations are seeking long term economic concessions for plantation agriculture to produce agro-fuels, rubber, oils, etc. These trends are also visible in coastal areas, where land, marine resources and water bodies are being sold, leased, or developed for tourism to corporate investors and local elites, at the expense of artisanal fishers and coastal communities. One way or the other, agricultural lands and forests are being diverted away from peasants, fishers and pastoralists to commercial purposes, and leading to displacement, hunger and poverty.

Land grabbing – even where there are no related forced evictions - denies land for local communities, destroys livelihoods, reduces the political space for peasant oriented agricultural policies and distorts markets towards increasingly concentrated agribusiness interests and global trade, rather than sustainable peasant agriculture for local and national markets and for future generations. Since foreign land acquisition is profit-oriented and largely for exports, it will foster the introduction/deepening of an industrial agricultural mode of production in the host countries. This mode of production will accelerate eco-system destruction and the climate crisis. Promoting or permitting land grabbing, therefore, violates the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It also undermines the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The upcoming session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on 11-14 October, 2010, in Rome includes a policy roundtable which will concretely discuss two international policy initiatives addressing the issues of governance of tenure and international investment in agriculture from the point of view of food security: the FAO Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Land and Natural Resources Tenure and the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture (RAI). The latter are not conceived as public policy on agricultural investment nor as state regulation of private agricultural investment, but as self-regulatory policy advice to mitigate the negative impacts of large-scale land acquisition. For policies which are violating human rights and international law this is utterly inadequate. In contrast, the FAO Guidelines entail the opportunity to increase the protection of the rights to land and natural resources of all rural constituencies.

In light of widespread land grabbing, governments and the international community must urgently act to comply with their human rights obligations to respect and protect access to land, water and other natural resources of rural communities. During the upcoming session of CFS, I would like to request you

- to take measures in your sphere of competence and influence to ban land grabbing;
- to give a strong mandate to the FAO Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Land and Natural Resources Tenure and include therein standards which effectively ban land grabbing;
- not to support the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and settle all land related issues as part of the FAO Guidelines.

Please keep me informed about the measures you take in this regard.

Yours sincerely,