FoodFirst Information & Action Network
P.O. Box 102243 - 69012 Heidelberg
Germany - Tel: +49 6221 65300-30

International Encounter of Landless Peasants San Pedro Sula, Honduras

Seminar Report

24 to 28 July 2000
San Pedro Sula

Convened by
FIAN International
Vía Campesina

Overview

1. Introduction

The first International Encounter of Landless Peasants was held from 24 to 28 July 2000 in San Pedro Sula, the industrial centre on the northern coast of Honduras. The conference which formed part of the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform was convened by Vía Campesina, the international movement of small farmers associations and FIAN, the organisation for the human right to feed one self. More than 80 delegates from 24 countries came together to discuss in detail their experiences and problems but also to get to know each other and to find out that on the other side of the planet there are farmers who fight against the same unjust structures.

1.1 Objective

The objective of this report of the Encounter is to reflect the positions of different protagonists as well as the key points of the debate.

2. Introduction speeches

Carlos Flores Facussé, President of Honduras

"To find a balance between ecology, demographic pressure, the food needs of the population, the rational and sustainable use of water, is one of the most pressing problems humanity has to face at the end of this century as well as the generations of the next millennium. Some of the answers may be found in agrarian reform programs designed to achieve a just and democratic distribution of land. But land by itself does not generate production. Therefore we have to add to this important capital other essential elements such as the transfer of technology, the openings of new markets, fair price for agricultural products - knowing that, in order to experience progress, farmers have to obtain the benefits of education, training and health care. Let us say then that land is important, but only as pivotal centres of broader comprehensive programs in which all essential human rights, the rights of the family, gender respect and possible social security for the benefit of the children are combined. I have said in a number of forums and I shall repeat it whenever necessary that every man and woman has the right to have a loaf of bread the size of their hunger and a piece of land the size of their dignity. And we have to do this now before social explosions occur in the quest for bread, for land and for water as some futurologists from all over the world have predicted would occur if we did not take the necessary measures in each of our countries which are affected today more than ever by increasing poverty, marginalisation, exclusion and violence..."

Aníbal Delgado Fiallos, Director of the National Agrarian Institute INA

"The unjust distribution of the resource land has led to poverty for many, a warped urban growth, lack of education and the formation of terribly authoritarian governments. Our societies, better prepared than those of the past, with new concepts about development and progress, freed from the prejudices and the witch-hunting of the Cold War are unanimous in demanding land possession structures where it is possible to share and where farm labourers have full access to social benefits and they propose and try out models of different characteristics and orientation, but all with the honest aim to make the life of the farm worker absolutely dignified. Some speak of an agrarian reform supported by the market, others of the new rural economy, the ones of a new rurality, the others of a sustainable rural growth. The Pope simply speaks of agrarian reform and urges the governments to introduce programs of access to land on the basis of love and solidarity. And what better times to reflect upon and do these things than when the Christian world celebrates the Jubilee Year, the year of making amends, of compensating, of giving back and cancelling debt, the year in which the spirit of fairness should show itself, in the realm of domestic social relations as well as in international relations. As the prophet said: Seek justice, do the orphan justice and defend the widow, give the suppressed his rights".

Rafael Alegría, International Secretary of La Vía Campesina

"...FIAN International approached Vía Campesina and suggested to us the idea, on the basis of the accords of the World Food Summit, to carry out a joint campaign and that this campaign should be the fight for the Agrarian Reform. At Vía Campesina we are absolutely convinced that the problem with access to land in Asia, Africa, Latin America and even in Europe is a central problem. We said: Let us go ahead with this global campaign for agrarian reform and soon the situation on an international level has changed and is favourable for us. Five years ago and throughout all the neoliberal policies we were considered somewhat crazy or deranged when we spoke of agrarian reform and we were told that this subject had already been buried and was no longer on the agenda and that those who still wanted to bring it up were hotheads. And then the "new colonisers", the World Bank, The International Monetary Fund and others come to the conclusion that in Asia, Africa and even in Europe and Latin America the problem of land is a problem which has not been solved yet and that a solution must be found. Of course, they propose a model which is different from ours, but they are apparently worried about the problem of access to land and they now propose an access to land through the market. And we respond: No, it is not possible to access land in the way the World Bank is suggesting. We shall access land through Agrarian Reform as the *Sem Terra* movement of Brazil proposes, as all organisations present in this international meeting have proposed. It took a great effort to realise this event and

we have made it. We are 24 countries here which have come together for the same problem of access to land, with the same aspiration to make a comprehensive reform. We are very hopeful that in this international meeting we may define fighting strategies, mechanisms for concrete work, that we may exchange experiences and that we join forces. In light of a globalisation of the economy we have to globalise our fight and we have to globalise hope!"

Michael Windfuhr, Executive Director of FIAN International

"If we want to solve the problem of poverty we cannot avoid the subject of unequal distribution of land and means of production. Access to means of production is a key question for the aim that the marginalised groups have the ability to feed themselves. This is said in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations. Human rights give all landless families, and marginalised groups, the backing of international law in their struggle with their governments on access to economic possibilities, access to land for the landless and security of existing access to land. The strength of the human rights approach is that it necessitates the discussion of rights and state obligations. We are very honoured by your presence, Mr. President, at the opening of this Encounter as a sign of the commitment of your government to the effective implementation of the agrarian reform programs. I would like to take this opportunity to ask you, on behalf of this international forum, that you take the necessary steps so that your government may soon resolve the most important land issues in Honduras of the moment – the cases of CREM and CAGSSA- to the benefit of the landless farming families and their rights. We should also like to urge your government to include a program of a broad and comprehensive agrarian reform within the strategy to reduce poverty, an essential prerequisite for Honduras to become a beneficiary of the program of foreign debt cancellation".

3. Agrarian Reforms as Human Rights Obligation

Presented by Sofia Monsalve Suárez, Coordinator of the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, FIAN International

Only few centuries ago, torture and cruel executions were considered necessary to maintain law and order. Today, state action of this type are seen for what they are: serious human civil rights violations. The conflicts over economic resources, however, are still considered as mere conflicts of interests over property, without taking into account that for one of the parties in conflict what is at stake is livelihood itself. In the name of free market and modernisation we continue to contribute to this day to the denial or the destruction of the means of subsistence

for poor farming families. The fight for civil human rights put an end to political absolutism. Our fight today for human economic rights, for the right to have access to land in order to be able to feed oneself, seeks to bring economic absolutism to an end. To talk about agrarian reforms in terms of human rights means to speak of the obligations the states need fulfil. This is the starting point for FIAN in its commitment to the agrarian reform. This legal obligation has been accepted by most states in various basic documents of international law such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations. Article 11 of this Covenant asserts the Right to Adequate Food and spells out explicitly the "reform of agricultural systems" as one of the most important means of realising the Right to Food. The right to adequate food, just like any other human right, imposes three types or levels of obligations upon the states.

- The states are under the obligation to **respect** the right to adequate food for any person in its jurisdiction and under all circumstances. This means that the state may not take any measure which could destroy the existing access of vulnerable groups to sources of food. Forced evictions or taking away land by the states without adequate compensation, for instance, is a violation of the human right to food, because the victims depend on their land for their sustenance.
- The states are furthermore under the obligation to **protect** any person in their jurisdiction against third parties threatening his or her access to food. The communities of the Cacarica river in the north of Colombia, for example, were violently ejected from their lands by paramilitary groups who wanted to take over ownership in order to exploit the wood. The Colombian state violated the right to food of these families by not rendering them any type of protection to impede that their lands be taken away from them and that they remain without access to food.
- In the case that a person or a group of people lack an adequate access to food, the states are under the obligation to **fulfil** such access. The states must offer vulnerable groups effective programs and strategies which ensure them over a long term to be able to develop their abilities and resources to provide sustenance for themselves. For those who do not have land the fundamental means to realise their right to feed one self is the agrarian reform. The failure of the states to carry out such reforms or the irregularities in the existing programs are a violation of the right to feed oneself.

In the struggle for access to land the landless families have the support of human rights and international law. This focus offers enormous political advantages since it stresses the legitimacy of the struggle and facilitates the forming of alliances with

other social sectors. Furthermore, human rights allow to challenge arguments of economy and development theories which deny the necessity to carry out agrarian reform programs or are in favour of farming models based on modern and large scale production.

4. Experiences

Market-based Land Reform: The politics of landlessness and rural poverty in South Africa

by Tom Lebert, Deputy Director of the National Land Committee NLC, South Africa

With the arrival of the first Europeans in the middle of the 17th century the indigenous population's deprivation of their land began. At first, the colonisers occupied the land as pastures for subsistence farming. The African tenants who staid on land appropriated by whites maintained a certain degree of ownership over the land they cultivated as well as over the product. Neither whites not blacks had the necessary capital and technology to cultivate vast expanses of land. The introduction of a capitalist economy around 1850 is closely linked to the extraction of minerals (gold and diamonds) which produced an economically powerful sector and the opening of markets. Toward the end of the 19th century the systematic deprivation of the land that belonged to the original inhabitants began. There were more and more colonisers who had enough capital to invest in the land. They just needed the manpower of the African tenants. The Africans had to give an increasing percentage of their labour in order to be able to stay on their land. This exploitation of indigenous manpower became state policy, confirmed in an increasingly hard legislation. And the state put their coercive instruments at the disposal of the land owners to discipline those Africans who resisted sacrificing their independence to make others rich. When the work on the plantations became mechanised and the demand for manpower decreased, reservations were created for the black population. The result of this was that at the beginning of the nineties the African majority (a rural population of twelve million) was concentrated on only 14 % of the territory whilst the white minority (approximately 60 000 farms) controlled the remaining 86 %. Of the 17 million hectares occupied by Africans, only 15 % were used as farmland. Hence 74 % of the poor live in the country and at 29 % unemployment is higher in the rural areas than in the cities (19%). During the years of the struggle the African National Congress (ANC) adopted a "Program of Reconstruction and Development" which contemplated an Agrarian Reform with broad redistribution of land as its central element. Later, when the dialogue with the white regime was initiated, it sacrificed a good deal of its aspirations to an economic transformation. The attempt to solve the agrarian problem were minimal

and ahistoric since they are based on market mechanisms. As a result, the access to land does not depend any more on the race factor but on the class factor (with the result that the privileged minority basically retains its privileges). Instead of opening economic perspectives for the Africans, the land market contributed to saving the bankrupt white landowners to get rid of land of lesser quality. The conservative change in the macro-economic policies (in line with the so-called Washington Consensus) has influenced sectarian policies accordingly. Hence the commitment to reconstruction and development have been adapted to the demands of a structural adjustment and the creation of an internationally competitive economy. As a result of all this the Agrarian Reform has failed and has rather increased the tensions in the country. As a consequence, the threat of a chaotic and uncontrolled occupation of land has increased.

The Struggle for an Agrarian Reform in Indonesia

By Henry Saragih, Federation of Indonesian Peasant Union FSPI

When Indonesia obtained its independence in 1945, the agrarian structure was characterised by an extreme concentration of landownership. President Sukarno proclaimed an agrarian reform in 1960. But this reform could not be implemented due to the political upheaval which culminated in the coup d'état of 1965. During the regime of more than three decades by Suharto the reform did not advance. Sukarno's populism was replaced by a policy of capitalist orientation which later took on neoliberal characteristics. The peasant remained poor and marginalised from education. However, the peasant organisations, often aided by student movements and some NGOs, did not cease to demand an agrarian reform and proceeded to take land from big capitalists. To stop this fight, Suharto let loose the military terror against all these organisations. This is why the peasants' struggle did not prosper. In May 1998 Suharto resigned amid protests and unrest. After a short transition period led by a Suharto protégé, Yusuf Habibie, more than 40 political parties came into being. The general elections in 1999 brought Abdurrahman Wahid and Megawati Sukarnoputri to power. Even though they are identified by a more democratic approach they do not consider an agrarian reform a fundamental step towards the restructuring of the political and economic system. FSPI considers that without a profound agrarian reform, Indonesia will continue to depend on international aid. This government, however, is heading into the opposite direction. Not long ago it has signed an agreement of co-operation with the World Bank and Australian Aid to establish a land market.

The Agrarian Problems in Europe

Jean Jacques Patin, Peasants Confederation, France

Although Europe is considered a developed area, the farmers and small and medium size producers also face a number of difficulties. There are farmers without land, there are farmers who have been forced from their land by a policy of low prices for production which leads to ruin and forces them to sell their land. On the other hand there are big landowners who get rich by the bonuses they are awarded by the European Union. This means that an agrarian reform is necessary in Europe, adapted to the European context. I have to point out the special cases of southern Spain and Portugal where a real agrarian reform still needs to be carried out since there is still an enormous concentration of landownership as a consequence of desertification, immigration and social disasters for the agricultural workers. In Europe we are fighting for a change of common agricultural policies which governs all European politics and is the first cause of our difficulties. It is because this policy has impelled a production model which day after day causes 600 farms to disappear in the European Union. It is a policy based on a production model for export which also ruins farmers in other countries. It is a model which is not concerned with the social consequences it may cause. Also as regards environmental and health issues it is a model without future. The neoliberal economic policies adopted by most governments worsens the situation even further. These policies subjugate local agrarian economies to the interest of international capitalism. These policies open the markets to multinational companies and make the interest rates rise, they dismantle public service networks which are fundamental for rural development: agricultural research, technical assistance and price and credit policies.

The Movement of Landless Rural Workers MST from Brazil

By Itelvina Masioli, MST

Since the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500, land in Brazil has been concentrated in only few hands. There has never been a process of Agrarian Reform even though the necessity of a redistribution of land is evident. Some 4.8 million rural families (approximately 20 million people out of an overall population of 160 million) have no land of their own. The Movement of Landless Rural Workers MST emerges in 1984 as a response to the necessities of this mass of poor people without perspective. Today, MST is organised in 23 of the 27 federal states. 200,000 families have received a total of 7 million hectares by means of land taking and other activities of the MST. In the conquered areas, distinct types of agricultural co-operation has developed. MST does not only organise land taking but also brings the struggle for land into the cities and wants to demonstrate that the agrarian reform is in the interest of everybody since everybody needs food. MST is a mass movement as well as a labour and political movement. Its three principal objectives

are: to democratise land ownership, to reorganise the agricultural sector and the food sovereignty. In light of the crisis of the left, MST takes on the challenge to organise movements and organisations of the left. There are many ways to overcome this crisis: People should know their history and their rights. They also need to be shown new ideals. Paulo Freire used to say that we need new ways of reaching out to people in democratic systems. We have to make positive propaganda. For example, after a rally in the city we plant a tree or all demonstrators donate blood. The ties between the cities have to be strengthened. It is also necessary to discuss a social project in Brazil instead of a neoliberal system.

5. Women's Panel

Francisca Ortega, National Federation of Woman Peasants of Bolivia 'Bartolina Sisa':

Since the revolution of 1952, in Bolivia we have mobilised all our brothers and sisters towards an agrarian reform. But woman did not obtain equal access to land. We woman get up, we do not stay at home. In 1980 we had a mobilisation and that is where we founded the national federation. Our aim has been equality in the distribution of land. We pressurised until 1996. This year a second agrarian reform gave equality for woman and men. But it was not easy: We organised a nation-wide mobilisation: there were fatalities, casualties, arrests and cases of imprisonment.

Alicia Calles, Coordinating Council of Peasant Organisations of Honduras:

In Honduras women have always been the protagonists in regaining land within the peasant movement. When we began to become part of the regaining of land in the seventies and eighties, the repression against the peasant movement was serious. In the settlements, only the women and the children stayed behind because they had a bit of respect for us. When they got our poor men and took them to prison we rebelled. We went to the municipalities where the jails were full of fellow peasants. And we, maybe even pregnant and with a bunch of children went all over the place to see how we could get our husbands out. It was a hard struggle and very tough form us. In the nineties, when we women started flying the flag, the Callejas government began to divide the peasant movement and as a next step divided the woman's organisations, even persecuted some women who have been more pronounced. It was perhaps this which led us to create a strategy to counter repression by the military, the police and the landowners. We wanted to win a struggle for land and now we have fought to unite the women who are in the government with those who are in the opposition. This is how we formed the Confederation of Women where we organised 5 women's organisations who are all

peasants with experience in the struggle. Now the Confederation of Women brings together approximately 40,000 women.

Mercedes Salas, Association of Farmers and Cattle-Raisers, Rioja/Spain:
In Spain, women have always worked the land but until 1969 we did not have access to social security. We had major difficulties to get into the system and we had to meet a great deal of requirements to obtain our rights. Even though more and more women have joined the social security system, it is still difficult to get in. When we apply for affiliation we are treated like criminals. Whereas applications by men are dealt with in a period 2 months, for women it may take a year and they often turn it down. There have been many lawsuits and although women have won some, many women do not pursue their case because they are more vulnerable. Another problem is that in a couple only one can have social security. If a couple runs a farm it is usually the man who gets better conditions. The women have to find another job to get social security.

Sister Nida Pineda, President of FIAN- Philippines:
The Philippines inherited the Spanish patriarchal system in which men make decisions. Now there are many women in Congress but in the country they seldom have political power. It is still the men who are in charge. The female agricultural worker earns less than a man. If a title deed is to be had, it is the men who manage to get them. There are many ways to fight for better conditions for women: to raise awareness, to ensure loans for those who work the land, independent of gender, to obtain access to technology, to ensure the implementation of laws protecting women. There are many cases of rape and although rape is a crime, the law is hardly applied. In addition to that, when women work outside, their children are often abused.

5.1 Comments

In India, there are a number of Congress seats reserved for women. However, although women may fill important positions, it is the men who make the decisions. In this there is no difference between neoliberals or the traditional patriarchy. Both systems should be challenged. In Thailand, all of the land a couple buys belongs to the man. But he cannot sell the land without his wife’s signature. If he dies, she inherits. Traditionally women have been exploited by men. As to power, only the daughters of rich families have access to important positions in a private company. However, they have advanced in politics and even the army. Women can become major.