



# Global Peasants Rights International Congress 2017

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**“Reaffirming that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing and must be treated in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis, and recalling that the promotion and protection of one category of rights should never exempt States from the promotion and protection of the other rights, recognizing the special relationship and interaction between peasants and other people working in rural areas, and the land, water, nature and territory to which they are attached and on which they depend for their livelihood”**

*Draft declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas presented by the Chair-Rapporteur of the working group - A/HRC/WG.15/4/2 - 15–19 May 2017*

The International Congress on Peasants' Rights took place from the 7th to the 10th of March, 2017 in Schwäbisch Hall, Germany. This event gathered more than 400 farmers, fishermen, shepherds, beekeepers, indigenous people, migrants and seasonal workers, women and youth, consumers, non-governmental organizations, academics, lawyers, activists and government representatives from more than 50 countries to share their experiences and opinions, to learn from each other, and to discuss the current process of formulating the draft United Nations' "Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Others People Working in Rural Areas".

This draft UN Declaration has its roots in the long-term movement to establish the rights of farmers all over the world. With the support of the Bolivian government, the process for a declaration of farmers' rights at the United Nations was brought forward and is now entering the fourth round of negotiations in May 2017.

The "Global Peasants' Rights" Congress shows that despite very different origins and backgrounds, it is possible to fight for the common dignity of people and na-

ture. This process is like a river fed by more and more tributaries, flowing through diverse landscapes and united into a common powerful stream of life.

Capital and its weapons are the main enemies of small-scale farmers. Corporations, national elites and governments take possession of the natural resources, endangering the local communities which have been living in harmony with nature for centuries. Women are rarely considered as agents of change and they suffer different forms of violence. Concentration of land ownership in the hands of a few actors is a culprit for the destruction of nature, biodiversity, and climate. Landless peasants are subject to a new form of modern slavery.

Women and migrants are the most vulnerable workers in rural areas. With little or no social security, they are forced to work in precarious conditions.

Rural animals are at risk of being expropriated by research centers and groups who would like to patent their genetic sequences. Through free trade agreements, the World Bank, the G7, and some other actors, the governments of the Global South are being forced to introduce

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**"Small scale food producers provide the vast majority of the world's food. They play an essential role in the fight against hunger and poverty and in preserving natural resources and the environment. Peasants' agrarian, fishing, pastoral and agro-ecological systems and the knowledge associated to each of these systems are fundamental for the renewal of agricultural biodiversity, for nutritious and healthy diets and for food sovereignty."**



industrial seeds and adapt their laws to international regulations for the protection of intellectual property. Small-scale farmers in Europe and other parts of the world are criminalized when they continue to grow their own animals and crops because the "free reproduction" of their own seed is prohibited under the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants.

The current form of international markets puts small-scale farmers in a disadvantaged position. Maintenance of low prices and lack of access to finances, infrastructure and insurance makes peasants vulnerable. Moreover, indigenous knowledge is often ignored by the upper-class scientific community.

Finally, peasants are subject to brutal repression. In many countries, the government-backed media manipulate public opinion against the rebellious rural population and thus support a system of oppression and inequality. When peasants defend their rights, lands and livelihoods, they face harassment by physical and legal means. On the pretext of combating terrorism, right-wing governments criminalize a large number of leaders of social movements. In addition, the global rise of xenophobia, nationalism, racism, homophobia and transphobia is a major threat to the food sovereignty and social sovereignty of the people and it threatens the identity of rural societies.

In light of these diverse threats, the UN Declaration on "the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas" is of strategic importance. This Declaration strengthens the legitimacy of farmers' demands and

makes their social, cultural and political values visible. It is a testimony to peasants' important contribution to the protection of the common good, whether by the provision of healthy food, the development of biodiversity or the preservation of creation.



The Declaration strengthens peasants' rights to land, water and natural resources, to seeds, to biodiversity, to food sovereignty, to adequate income and to production. It takes into account the importance of sustainable thinking across generations and the imparting of experience in rural areas before it is lost. Ultimately, it acknowledges that our common future and the future of humanity are

closely linked to the rights of small-scale farmers and other people working in rural areas. The Declaration is an important instrument for the survival and struggle of peasants and it bundles peasants' rights holistically and conclusively. It will change awareness and inspire new legal norms which can be a vehicle for bringing together the movements and struggles to create major systemic changes.

In order for the states to make a stronger commitment to the UN Declaration, the participants of the Global Peasants' Rights Congress call for all movements that support these rights, such as collectives of peasants, livestock farmers, shepherds, fishermen, primeval inhabitants, indigenous peoples, craftsmen and all their families as



well as the traditional communities and others to build alliances at the local and national level in order to resist these external pressures and mobilize for their rights.

In spite of our diverse origins and cultural backgrounds, peasants are being oppressed in a similar way and therefore must be united in solidarity: the south and the north, women and men, old and young, rural and urban

populations, migrants and indigenous people, fishermen, pastoral peoples, beekeepers and all their families. The Congress ended with a strong message stating "Our ability to organize ourselves is our most powerful tool and will lead to the effective enforcement of our rights as fellow human beings and peasants. As in a river, our forces are tiled into a powerful stream of life!"