

Vllth International Conference

EUSKAL
HERRIA,
BASQUE
COUNTRY

16 TO 24
JULY
2017



**WE FEED OUR PEOPLES AND
BUILD THE MOVEMENT TO
CHANGE THE WORLD!**



[PRESS KIT](#)

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ABOUT THE VIITH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF LA VIA CAMPESINA

WHO ARE WE?

La Via Campesina is an international movement bringing together millions of peasants, small and medium size farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world. Built on a strong sense of unity and solidarity, we defend peasant agriculture for food sovereignty to promote social justice and dignity and strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture that destroys social relations and nature. Women and Young Farmers play a crucial role in La Via Campesina. The movement defends their rights and gender equality and struggles against all forms of violence against women. We are an autonomous, pluralist, multicultural movement, political in its demand for social justice while being independent from any political party, economic or other type of affiliation.

A MOVEMENT BORN IN 1993

A group of farmers' representatives - women and men - from four continents founded La Via Campesina in 1993 in Mons, Belgium. At that time, agricultural policies and agribusiness were becoming globalized and small farmers needed to develop and struggle for a common vision. Small-scale farmers' organizations also wanted to have their voice heard and to participate directly in the decisions that were affecting their lives.

La Via Campesina is now recognised as a main actor in international food and agricultural debates. We are heard by institutions such as the FAO and the UN Human Rights Council, and is recognized among other social movements from local to global level.

LA VIA CAMPESINA IN 73 COUNTRIES

La Via Campesina comprises 164 local and national organisations in 73 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Altogether the movement represents about 200 million farmers.

South and East Africa – member organisations in Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo Mozambique, Madagascar, South Africa Tanzania and Zimbabwe

West and Central Africa – member organisations in Congo Brazzaville, Gambia, Ghana, Guinée Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo

East and Southeast Asia – member organizations in Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Timor Leste, Vietnam and Palestine¹

South Asia – member organizations in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka

South América – member organisations in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Perú, Uruguay, Venezuela

Central America – member organizations in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Nicaragua

Caribbean – member organisations in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Puerto Rico, in the Windward Islands (Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Dominica)

North America – member organizations in Canada, Mexico, and USA

Europe – Austria, Belgium, Basque Country (Spain), Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherland, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Turkey, Scotland/UK, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK

This list enumerates all the countries represented as of March before the incorporation of new members, which will take place in Basque Country during the VIIth International Conference. A comprehensive and updated list of the members of La Via Campesina will be published after the VIIth Conference.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND COLLECTIVE DECISION MAKING

La Via Campesina International Conferences are the highest-level space for proposing and making decisions within the movement. Our International Conferences take place every 4 years and bring together hundreds of farmers as representatives of our member organisations from around the world. It is during these conferences that key issues, positions, and policy orientations for the next four years are discussed and defined. It is also the space where the rules, mechanisms, and structures for participatory and democratic functioning of the movement are laid out. Just before the International Conference itself, the Youth of La Via Campesina will hold their Fourth International Assembly and the Women of La Via Campesina will be holding their Fifth International Assembly.

¹ Palestine, is currently clubbed with South East Asia region of La Via Campesina, for administrative purposes only. La Via Campesina with support from its local allies is strengthening the movement in MENA region.

Our VIIth Conference, in the Basque Country, will lead to the collective building and adoption of a new document, which will present the vision of La Via Campesina for the future and adopt a collective action plan for the 4 years to come.

Since the VIth International Conference (Jakarta, Indonesia, 2013), LVC deepened our organizational processes and strengthened our strategies towards the goal of food sovereignty and agroecological production. We have broadened our work on the ground to advance peasant agroecological practices, safeguard seeds and traditional knowledge, and defend land and territorial rights. We have also stepped up our campaigning and direct policy advocacy in key international spaces such as the FAO (within the Committee on World Food Security and engaging governments regarding the International Seed Treaty); The UN Human Rights Council in Geneva (moving forward our proposal for a *UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas* as well as participating in discussions and negotiations for a *Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights*; The UN Climate processes (to demand climate justice and propose peasant agroecology as a solution to the climate crisis); Persistent campaigns against WTO and the free trade regime promoted through FTAs, bilateral and regional trade agreements.

Importantly, we have strengthened our movement by intentionally supporting the protagonism of women and youth at all levels of our organizations, and by building new spaces for peasant organizations to connect in the Middle East and North Africa. During this period, we have also identified crucial issues that we must address as a unified movement : rights of migrants and refugees (many of whom come from peasant and rural communities); the criminalization of peasant leaders and organizations as well as the increasing violations of peasant rights and defenders of land and territory; the need to build more power through deeper alliances with other movements and organizations.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE - A CRUCIAL STEP IN STRENGTHENING THE MOVEMENT

From July 16th to 24th, 2017, La Via Campesina will gather in Derio, Biskaia in the Basque Country to re-affirm the commitment of member organizations to build a common path towards food sovereignty based on the rights and heritage of peasants, rural peoples, indigenous peoples, and other small-scale food producers (fisherfolk, pastoralists, and others).

The VIIth Conference will be preceded by the *IVth International Youth Assembly* and by the *Vth International Women's Assembly*. These are key spaces for women and young people in the movement to develop their analysis and strategies, and participate more strongly in the full VII Conference. Regional delegations to the VII Conference strive to have one-half women and

one-third youth participation, and the Assemblies prior to the full Conference facilitates that these representations become meaningful participations.

Along with social movement allies and special guests, the VIIth Conference will include thematic group discussions on priority issues. Plenaries and cultural celebrations will bring together the diverse experiences and viewpoints from around the world, and a market-place of ideas and knowledge will give all participants an opportunity to exchange experiences ranging from organizational matters to concrete issues in food production such as seed saving and responding to climate changes.

A TIMELINE OF INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES OF LA VIA CAMPESINA

- 1993, Belgium – Ist International Conference
- 1996, México – IInd International Conference
- 2000, India – IIIrd International Conference, Ist Women’s Assembly
- 2004, Brazil – IVth International Conference, IInd Women’s Assembly, Ist Assembly of Youth
- 2008, Mozambique – Vth International Conference, IIIrd Women’s Assembly, IInd Assembly of Youth
- 2013, Indonesia – VIth International Conference, IVth Women’s Assembly, IIIrd Assembly of Youth -
- 2017 in the Basque Country, Spain – VIIth International Conference, Vth Women’s Assembly, IVth Assembly of Youth – *****Scheduled to happen in the month of July*****

WHERE WILL THE VIITH CONFERENCE BE HELD?

Hotel-Seminario en Derio, Bizkaia (5 minutes from Loiu airport)

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

16 July: Youth Assembly

17 July: Youth Assembly in the morning, Women Assembly in the afternoon

18 July: Women Assembly, (17h30-19h00) Regional meetings

19 July: Opening Act VII International Conference of La Via Campesina

19-22 July: VII International Conference (and parallel activities)

23 July: Public Act and Producers’ Fair in Bilbao

24 July: Field visits to diverse producers in Basque Country

25-28 July: Optional exchanges for few of the LVC delegates to spend time in different territories of Basque Country to exchange experiences, have meetings with institutions and learn about social movements in the territory.

WHO WILL COME TO THE BASQUE COUNTRY IN JULY 2017?

Delegations from each of LVC’s 9 regions (Southern and Eastern Africa, Central and Western Africa, South America, Central America, Caribbean, North America, Europe, Southeast and East Asia, and South Asia), as well as our member organization in Palestine and candidate

members from Morocco and Tunisia (part of an exploratory process in the Middle East and North Africa), will come together to assess where we come from, analyse the current context and situations on the ground, and map out strategies towards the future. Allies from other social movements and few NGOs are also invited and are expected to attend.

An estimated 500 peasants, women, young people, indigenous people – will reflect on the challenges faced and the advances made in the construction of Food Sovereignty through Peasant Agroecology, the Defence of Land and Territory, and the Defence of Peasant Rights.

LOGISTICS OF THE SEVENTH CONFERENCE OF LA VIA CAMPESINA

Internet access at the venue: Yes

Facility to hold Interviews: Yes

Availability of a Press Room: Yes

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PRESS INFORMATION:

WHY IS THE VIITH CONFERENCE IMPORTANT FOR THE MEDIA?

La Via Campesina is among the largest social movements in the world and is the voice of nearly 200 million peasants, rural workers, migrant workers, indigenous people, fisherfolk communities across the planet.

Once every four years, with the support of our allies who act in solidarity in our daily struggles, we bring all our grassroots members from all regions of the world, in one place and under one roof, to exchange and learn from each other and to celebrate the power of global solidarity and unity. It is a special occasion for any one, including the media, to be a witness to this incredible gathering of cultural, regional and agricultural diversity of people, who work the land and feed the world.

WHAT IS THE VIITH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF LA VIA CAMPESINA EXPECTED TO DISCUSS?

Defence of Land, Forest, Water Seeds, Territories: Over the years in all continents of the world, land grabbing enforced by a powerful State-Corporate nexus have displaced millions of peasants from their own land. Several of our peasant members have laid down their lives defending their territories. The assault has spread from land to capturing our forests, water, seas, lakes and seeds. There is a constant attempt by transnational corporations, well supported by a free trade regime, to capture the peasant way of agriculture and replace it with industrial agriculture. Seeds are being turned into commodities and legislations are put in place to criminalise and penalize peasants who have, for centuries, practiced free exchange, saving and usage of seeds. The planned mergers between transnational corporations now threaten to put the control of world's seeds in the hands of four or five big firms. Attempts by governments to create industrial corridors, special economic and industrial zones and efforts to privatise common land and lakes, are threatening the peasant way of life that has been practiced over thousands of years.

At the VIIth Conference, member organisations from around the world will be presenting their local realities in this context and to etch a strategy for a united global resistance, to counter these attempts and assaults.

Criminalisation, repression and violence against peasants, rural workers, migrants and indigenous people: People who work the land, water, forest and the seas, people who feed the world, people who for thousands of years have lived in harmony with Mother Earth are now facing a systemic assault of big capital and corporate power, which in collusion with the

State, threatens to eliminate their local systems and way of life. Across regions, our peasant militants and comrades have been criminalized, imprisoned, assaulted and killed for standing up in defence of their land, territory, culture and local food systems. The tales of repression are startling, sometimes depressingly gory and no country in the world is immune to it.

At the VIIth Conference, in a show of global unity and solidarity, the people of the land, the people who make La Via Campesina the global movement that it is, will lead a fight back. We will remember and commemorate the struggles and sacrifices of our people and will condemn the repression and violence that is going on.

Free Trade Agreements threatening Food Sovereignty: There are plenty of evidence which proves to us that free market, free trade economies serve a death knell to food sovereignty and put rural lives in complete disarray. At this juncture, peasants across regions and continents are not just faced with the threat of a free trade regime enforced by the World Trade Organization, but are also faced with the threats of bilateral and regional trade agreements, aimed to advance a neo-liberal regime. As WTO prepares for the next round of Ministerial Conference in Argentina in December 2017 and as negotiations for bilateral and regional treaties such as CETA, CEPA, RCEP and so forth are gaining pace, the VIIIth Conference will be a space for the world's peasants to collectively chalk out a strategy in defence of their food, seeds, culture and local markets. For journalists, this would provide an opportunity to hear from peasants around the world about the disastrous consequences of free trade agreements in the regions they come from.

Peasant solutions to Climate Change: COP 22 was yet another attempt to force the technocratic 'solutions' to climate crisis on communities, put forth by the same corporations and rich countries who are responsible for global warming in the first place. While multilateral institutions and governments of industrialized nations remain oblivious to the real challenges faced by rural peasants, workers, fisher folk and indigenous people, who continue to struggle at the frontlines of a rapidly changing climate, we are seeing an attempt to bring in 'climate smart solutions' as an alternative. None of these so-called "solutions" are meant to solve the problem of global warming. Instead, they are attempts to turn the crisis into a new market opportunity.

The VIIth Conference, will be a space for peasants and indigenous people to create a strategy to present peasant agriculture as a real solution to climate change. Journalists who are interested, will have an opportunity to hear about the alternatives that several member organisations of La Via Campesina are already pursuing in different regions of the world.

Bringing the youth back to land: World over, we are witnessing a trend of young people from farming families moving away from agriculture. In La Via Campesina, young peasants are presenting a transformative agenda to bring their counterparts across the world back to the land – through political study circles, agroecology exchange programs and frequent workshops.

The VIIth conference will be a unique opportunity to meet and listen to young peasants from around the world and the unique challenges they are faced with while building a counter-narrative to capitalism and neo liberalism.

Rights of Women in defence of food sovereignty: La Via Campesina have recognized the integral contribution of women to the strengthening of the peasant movement worldwide. Always at the frontline of our struggles to defend our territories, water, forest and seeds, women across the regions of the world, have been also fighting for their identity as peasants and for ownership of the land they cultivate in. *The Campaign against Violence done to Women* remains one of the main areas of work in La Via Campesina.

The VIIth Conference will provide our friends in the media an opportunity to interact with these leaders and engage in the rich exchanges offered in our fight against patriarchy and capitalism and the alternatives offered by feminist struggles.

Agroecology Schools of La Via Campesina: For La Via Campesina peasant agroecology is a way of life, a method for transforming food production into something more beneficial to humans and to Mother Earth. Rather than a mere set of practices for 'fine tuning' industrial agriculture, the global peasant movement believes that agroecology is the alternative to industrial farming. Our agroecology is political, it does not conform either to structures of power or to the monoculture system, but instead challenges power and places local communities at the centre of food production, in harmony with Mother Earth.

At the VIIth conference, people leading our peasant agroecology schools and training processes in various continents, like our peasant agroecology Institutes (IALA) in Latin America, the Sashe agroecology school in Zimbabwe, Amrita Bhoomi in India, and many more efforts in South East Asia, North America and Europe will be presenting all the aspects of what they practice.

A UN Declaration for Rights of Peasants: Negotiations for a *UN Declaration for the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas* are at very advanced stages within the United Nations. This is a process that was initiated by La Via Campesina more than a decade ago and the Declaration will provide a tool for peasants and other people working in rural areas worldwide to strengthen, further protect and give global recognition of their rights. The VIIth conference will be an opportunity to reflect on the collective strength of the movement that has advanced the process thus far. The conference will also be an opportunity to create a strategy to keep the pressure on all governments to accept the terms of the Declaration and to devise a roadmap to ensure international cooperation for the realization of UN Declaration.

KEY EVENTS IN WHICH LVC PARTICIPATED, SINCE THE VIth CONFERENCE

- UN Negotiations on Rights of Peasants (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016)
- UN Negotiations for a Treaty to regulate Transnational Corporations (2014, 2015, 2016),
- People's Climate Summit (New York 2014), Pre-COP Meetings,
- Mobilisations outside COP (Lima 2014, Paris 2015, Marrakech 2016)
- Mobilisations outside WTO Ministerial meetings, (2013, 2015),
- Mobilisations at UNCTAD2 (2016)
- FAO, Agroecology symposiums and IFAD Farmers Forum (2014),
- IYFF³ conferences (2014), International Conference on Nutrition (2014)
- UN Committee on Food Security (CFS) Meetings: (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), CSM⁴ Meetings on Responsible Agricultural Investment
- FAO Seed Treaty Meetings: (2013, 2014)
- UN Convention on Biological Diversity (2014, 2016)
- World Meeting of Popular Movements, Vatican (2014, 2016)
- International Mission of Solidarity with Colombia (2016)
- Ministerial Meeting of the Latin American States (2013)
- SADC⁵ Peoples Summit (2014, 2016),
- Mobilisations against seeds laws pushed by SADC and COMESA⁶, Interventions at ARIPO⁷
- People's Global Action (PGA) on Migration, Development and Human Rights (Dhaka, 2016),
- Demonstration outside United Nations' High-Level Dialogue on the Rights of Migrants (2013),
- Mobilisations in US, Canada, Palestine, East and South East Asia for rights of migrants
- People's Mobilisations such March Against Monsanto, Global March of Women, International Day of Peasant Struggles, Climate March, Several Regional Mobilisations Against FTAs, Mobilisations to highlight EU Milk Crisis and many more
- World Social Forums (Tunis 2013, Quebec 2016)
- Int'l Tribunals – Monsanto Tribunal in Hague (2016), Swaziland Tribunal on TNC Absues (2016), EU Parliament hearing on human rights abuse by TNCs
- Maputo Conference (2015) to highlight abuses by TNCs
- Mali Agroecology Forum (2015), International Meeting on Agroecology (Cuba, 2015)
- Nyéléni Forum Meetings, European Food Sovereignty Forum
- Conference on Human Rights (2016, Brazil)
- International Conference on Agrarian Reform (2016, Brazil)

² UN Conference on Trade and Development

³ International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) by the United Nations

⁴ Civil Society Mechanism

⁵ Southern Africa Development Community

⁶ Common Market for East and Southern Africa

⁷ African Regional Intellectual Property Organization

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT - LA VIA CAMPESINA

La Via Campesina will hold its VIIth International Conference in Basque Country this July

(Abadiño, 09 May 2017) About 500 peasants, who are members of more than 160 organizations spread throughout 73 countries across the world, will convene in Derio, Bizkaia (Basque Country), 16 – 24 July 2017, for the VIIth International Conference of La Via Campesina. This conference will be preceded by the International Youth Assembly and the International Women's Assembly.

These international conferences are held every four years, and are the highest body of collective decision-makings and debates, giving way to the creation of a common mobilization agenda for the global peasant movement.

During the VIIth International Conference, peasants from around the globe will re-affirm the commitment of member organizations to build a common path towards Food Sovereignty based on the rights and heritage of peasants, rural peoples, indigenous peoples, and other small-scale food producers (fisherfolk, pastoralists, and others).

The opening ceremony for the VIIth Conference will take place on July 19th, and will gather hundreds of participants as well as national and international personalities.

During the last twenty-four years, Via Campesina has held six international conferences. The first in Belgium in 1993, followed by Mexico in 1996, India in 2000, Brazil in 2004, Mozambique in 2008 and with the last one being held in Indonesia 2013 – all of which advanced the fights and struggles of people from every continent, and served to strengthen the peasant movement at a global level.

PARTICIPATION AND ACCREDITATION OF JOURNALISTS

VIIth International Conference of La Via Campesina

in Derio, Bizkaia (Basque Country), 16th – 24th July 2017

MEDIA INVITATION

The international peasant's movement La Via Campesina invites journalists from around the world to cover our *VIIth International Conference*, which will be held in Derio, Bizkaia (Basque Country), 16th – 24th July 2017. This will be preceded by the IVth International Assembly of LVC Youth and the Vth International Assembly of LVC Women.

In the current context of economic, environmental, and food crises, peasant movements from around the world will discuss the alternatives that food sovereignty and peasant farming offer in the face of agribusiness and the neoliberal model policies. The international peasant movement will look for strategies against green capitalism, land grabbing and the grabbing of other common goods which put the balance between the earth and humanity in danger.

The VIIth Via Campesina Conference is open to the media and to journalists. However, all must be duly accredited in advance by the Via Campesina team in charge of media relations. If you are interested in participating, please complete the form (available with this document) and we will be in touch. It is also possible to organize interviews with the delegates through Skype, telephone, or other means of communication in coordination with our media team.

For clarification purposes, Via Campesina will not cover the costs of transport to Spain, or accommodation for journalists. However, we can commit to giving all the logistical information necessary to guarantee your participation in the VIIth Conference.

ELIGIBILITY

Applications for accreditation will be granted to representatives of:

- o-- Recognized daily newspapers, wire and news services
- o-- National and Regional lifestyle magazines, news web portals and newspapers
- o-- Local and national radio and television stations and networks
- o-- Photographers with any of the above agencies

o-- Credentials are not allocated to freelance writers or photographers who are not commissioned by an accredited news organization to cover an event on their behalf (referring letter to accompany application).

VISITS TO FARMS/FIELD VISITS

During the Conference, there is the possibility of organizing visits to the countryside, for those who wish to get to know more closely the reality of the small farmers and diverse producers in the Basque Country. These trips can be organized by La Via Campesina but must be charged to the journalists and press organisations. You can also join the field trip organized for all participants on July 24th, but we ask you to inform us about your interest to do so.

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- Facebook: *ViaCampesinaOfficial*

FORM FOR MEDIA ACCREDITATION AT THE VIITH CONFERENCE OF LA VIA CAMPESINA

Online Accreditation form: www.bitly.com/ViaCampesinaMedia-EN

First Name* _____ Last Name _____

Phone Number _____ Mobile Number _____

E--mail Address* _____

Twitter Handle _____

Designation _____

Name of the Publication / Program / Media Organization you are representing*:

Phone Number _____

Postal Address:

Coverage Type:

Expected outcomes from the conference (Will you write articles, publish pictures, produce videos?)

PLEASE NOTE: YOU WILL BE ALLOCATED A MEDIA BADGE AS SOON AS WE RECEIVE YOUR APPLICATION. WITHOUT PROPER ACCREDITATION, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO COVER THE CONFERENCE

I agree to abide by the regulations set out in this document.

<Signature of the Applicant>

<DATE OF APPLICATION>

** Mandatory to fill*

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF LA VIA CAMPESINA

By Annette Aurélie Desmarais'

La Via Campesina is now recognized as being the most politically significant transnational agrarian movement existing today. Numerous social movements consider it as a key point of reference in the struggles against the instruments of capitalism and it is also recognized by United Nations institutions as the international voice of peasant communities. Over the past 24 years La Via Campesina has gained strength and legitimacy as it has succeeded in carving out a space in the international arena and filling that space with the voices of peasants, small--scale farmers, women, farm workers and indigenous peoples who articulated peasant demands and peasant alternatives. The movement has also grown rapidly; initially bringing together 46 organizations, it now embraces 150 organizations from 70 countries representing millions of rural peoples in Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Africa⁸.

La Vía Campesina emerged in a particular economic, political and social context that was undermining the ability of peasants around the world to maintain control over land and seeds.

It emerged during a time when a particular model of rural development was altering rural landscapes, threatening to make local knowledge irrelevant and denigrating rural cultures. Key elements in this phenomenon were the encroaching globalization of a modern industrial model of agriculture, on the one hand, and the search for an alternative approach among those most harmed by the epidemic of dislocation left in its wake.

In May 1993 at a conference held in Mons, Belgium, forty--six representatives (men and women) of organizations of peasants, small farmers, indigenous peoples and farm workers from various regions formally created La Via Campesina. But, the roots of La Vía Campesina stretch way back. Throughout the 1980s the founding members of La Via Campesina participated in dialogue and exchanges with counterparts within their regions and internationally. This eventually led to the creation of regional movements like the CPE in Europe as well as ASOCODE and the CLOC in Latin America. The dialogue and exchanges also led to the signing of the Managua Declaration signed by representatives of eight farm organizations from Central America, the Caribbean, Europe, Canada and the United States who had gathered to participate in the Second Congress of the Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos held in Managua, Nicaragua in 1992.

La Vía Campesina formed in the North and south around common objectives: an explicit rejection of the neo--liberal model of rural development, an outright refusal to be excluded from agricultural policy development and a fierce determination not to be "disappeared" and

⁸ *At the time of publishing this press kit, La Via Campesina embraces 164 organisations in 73 countries as its members. This article, is an excerpt from a book by Annette Aurélie Desmarais', published first in 2007.*

a commitment to work together to empower a peasant voice. Through its strategy of “building unity within diversity” and its concept of food sovereignty, peasant and farmers’ organizations around the world are working together to ensure the well-being of rural communities.

The goal of La Via Campesina is to bring about change in the countryside – change that improves livelihoods, enhances local food production for local consumption, and opens up democratic spaces change that empowers the people of the land with a great role, position, and stake in decision-making on issues that have an impact on their lives. The movement believes that this kind of change can occur only when local communities gain greater access to and control over local productive resources, and gain more social and political power.

Since the signing of the Uruguay Round of the GATT in 1994 representatives of rural organizations from the North, South, East and West organized in La Via Campesina have walked together in the streets of Geneva, Paris, Seattle, Washington, Québec, Rome, Bangalore, Porto Alegre, Cancun and Hong Kong, among other cities. Whenever and wherever international institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank, and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) meet to discuss agricultural and food issues, the Via Campesina is now there. La Via Campesina is also there in local communities when peasants and farming families in locales as diverse as Honduras, Mexico, Brazil, Guatemala, Indonesia, Europe or Canada are resisting the spread of genetically--modified seeds or are being evicted from their land to facilitate urban sprawl, the development of golf courses, intensive shrimp farms, large pig barns or plantations of eucalyptus.

For many this is all very surprising. For over a hundred years those who thought they knew what was happening in the countryside around the world have predicted the disappearance of the peasantry. Surely, by now they should all be gone! Instead, integrated into La Via Campesina peasants are turning up everywhere, a troublesome and discordant voice in the chorus extolling the praises of globalization. La Via Campesina presence has not gone unnoticed. Wearing dark green caps, pañuelos, white t-shirts and waving green flags embossed with its brightly coloured logo while energetically chanting slogans, the Via Campesina has become an increasingly visible and vocal voice of radical opposition to the globalization of a neoliberal and corporate model of agriculture.

This resistance took an extreme turn on September 10, 2003 – the first day of the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of the WTO held in Cancún, Mexico – with the tragic death of the Korean farm leader, Lee Kyung Hae. Lee, along with another 120 Koreans had joined the Via Campesina delegation in Cancún in efforts to get the WTO out of agriculture. Wearing a sign ---- “WTO kills farmers” ---- Lee walked up to the high wire fence that had been built to “protect” trade negotiators from protestors and stabbed himself to death. This ultimate and

tragic act of resistance symbolized what La Via Campesina had been saying all along: liberalization of agriculture is a war on peasants, it decimates rural communities and destroys farming families. Lee's desperate cry for change subsequently helped strengthen the Via Campesina as it has since declared September 10th an International Day of Protest Against the WTO. On that day, organizations in many countries mobilize for food sovereignty. Clearly, Lee's death has not been in vain.

The growing visibility of La Via Campesina as a key social actor, strongly rooted in local communities while at the same time being increasingly engaged and more skilful in the international stage, has attracted the attention of many rural organizations in search of alternatives. Between 2000 and 2004 the movement grew by over forty--one percent. During the movement's Fourth International Conference held in Itaici, Brazil in June 2004, forty--two organizations joined La Via Campesina.

La Via Campesina now includes 149 organizations from fifty--six countries⁹. Much of La Via Campesina's success is due to the fact that it is balancing – with great care and effort – the diverse interests of its membership as it openly deals with issues such as gender, race, class, culture and North/South relations, which could potentially cause divisions. According to La Via Campesina the conflict is not between farmers of the North and peasants in the South. Rather, the struggle is over two competing – and in many ways diametrically opposed – models of social and economic development. On the one hand, a globalized, neoliberal, corporate--driven model where agriculture is seen exclusively as a profit--making venture and productive resources are increasingly concentrated into the hands of agro--industry.

La Via Campesina, on the other hand, envisions a very different, more human, rural world, a world based on food sovereignty. Here, agriculture is peasant--driven, based on peasant production, uses local resources and is geared to domestic markets. In this model agriculture plays an important social function while at the same time being economically viable and ecologically sustainable.

The formation and consolidation of La Via Campesina is living proof that peasant and farm families have not been compliant accomplices during this process of economic restructuring, nor have they been passive victims in the face of increasing poverty and marginalization. Instead, they are actively resisting the globalization of a corporate model of agriculture. Indeed, peasants and farmers are using three traditional weapons of the weak – organization, co--operation and community – to redefine 'development' and build an alternative model of agriculture based on the principles of social justice, ecological sustainability and respect for peasant cultures and peasant economies. This involves building viable alternatives ranging from small agricultural cooperatives, local seed banks, fair trade ventures to reclaiming

⁹ *At the time of publishing this press kit La Via Campesina embraces 164 organisations in 73 countries as its members.*

traditional farming practices. It also means linking these efforts beyond the local by working at the national, regional and international levels.

In forming La Via Campesina, peasant organizations effectively internationalized and succeeded in carving out a space in the international arena. La Via Campesina is filling that space with peasant voices, articulating peasant demands and peasant alternatives in efforts to resist the imposition of a corporate model of agriculture. The solidarity and unity experienced with La Via Campesina yield perhaps the most precious gift of all, hope. Hope that 'another' agriculture is possible. Indeed, La Via Campesina enables us to imagine that change is possible and that an alternative project is being created. This is clearly captured in La Via Campesina's slogan "Globalize the Struggle –Globalize Hope."

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EUROPEAN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE CONTEXT TODAY

THE WORK PRIORITIES OF THE EUROPEAN PEASANT MOVEMENT EUROPEAN COORDINATION VIA CAMPESINA (ECVC)

The weight of the EU on market norms and mechanism around the world is alarming, as well as the power of European TNCs throughout the world. The EU is the largest importer and exporter of agriculture and food products. However, corporate greed has not spared the populations "at home". In the last two decades, the juncture of the economic crisis with the expansion of the agroindustrial model has had incredibly negative impacts on food consumptions and people's health and has led to the loss of jobs, bad living conditions for farmers and agricultural workers, and rural migration. Poverty is increasing more in rural areas than cities. In Europe, the lengthy siege against small and family farms by corporations supported by public policies, manifests itself through different fronts. Below you will find some sectors in which this is particularly illustrated and where ECVC has been actively working in the last years.

The Dairy Crisis – Two years after the end of the dairy quota regime in the EU no glimmer of hope exists on the horizon of dairy producers. Today, most dairy producers in Europe continue to sell every litre of milk at a loss. The stock of milk powder amounts to 418.978 million metric tons. Abandoning their farms, is the only way out for thousands of producers. In Spain, in a period of two years, 1,696 of the 17,000 farms that existed before the abolition of quotas disappeared. The continuous collapse of small and medium dairy farms -more rapidly than any other farming sector (France, Italy)- has been the dominant trend. Only the restoration of a public instrument for regulating production, limiting the development of large farms and preventing the implementation of macro-dairy projects will be able to curb the destruction of the European dairy sector and preserve the quality and sustainability of a peasant production model.

Seeds – Agricultural biodiversity has already been deeply eroded by a half-century of green revolution technology which replaced millions of local peasant seed populations for improved industrial varieties. Europe based genetic resources corporations, in many market sectors dominate the global market, reinforced by company mergers, patents and gene technology, and a strong capacity to impose legal frameworks at the global level (i.e. Africa).

With the spreading of genetic engineering, patented genes have invaded the most important global crops. Seeds produced out of these technologies are protected by patents and other strong IPR status (UPOV 91 Intellectual Property Rights). The industry is now promoting its

newest type of GMOs, resulting from New Breeding Techniques (NBTs). It pretends that the seeds and animals that are created using these NBTs are not GMOs. In Europe, the industry is taking advantage of the “de-materializations of genetic resources” and the weakness of European regulation, which was unable to consider techniques that didn’t exist prior to when it was written in 1990. The misinformation of the seed industry concerning the true nature of these new GM techniques is designed to eliminate all information available to peasants and consumers about the presence of GMOs, thus pushing them to cultivate, to breed and to eat these GMOs against their will.

This is why ECVC is developing its seed campaign along two axes. Firstly, by fighting against industrial seed legislations that criminalize peasants seeds and peasant practices on seeds, and enshrining in the laws of EU and at the global level the recognition of the inalienable collective rights of peasants and family farmers to conserve, use, exchange, sell and protect their seeds. Second, by promoting the exchange of know-how from farmer to farmer, and by organizing collectively production, use, sale and local conservation of our own seeds intended for small-scale farming and organic farming.

Land - Land concentration and land grabbing have been dramatically increasing across Europe. Despite its clear commitments on agricultural policy, land use and food security, the EU has spent many years treating agricultural land like a commodity. This has led to adverse situations around land concentration and land grabbing in Europe where 2.7% of farms are over 100ha and control 50% of arable land. However, most of the work and production is carried out on small and very small farms. Europe has 12 million farms, with 25 million people involved in agricultural production. 69% of farms have less than 5 ha and the average size is 14.2ha. These small farms are an essential pillar of rural employment, production and equality.

ECVC has argued for a European directive on farmland based on the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Land Tenure*¹⁰ unanimously endorsed by the Committee of World Food Security of UN in 2012. This directive is necessary to give clear guidelines to member states around land investments, protect farmland from change of use and facilitate fair access to land for new farmers, particularly for the youth. The European Parliament has prepared an own initiative report on the State of Play of Farmland Concentration in the EU, to which ECVC and its allies are actively contributing, with hopes that the voices of landless rural workers, foresters, small-scale and peasant farmers can be reflected in this work. ECVC urges EU institutions to move quickly and begin preparations for a European policy tool which is able to stop land concentration and degradation and allow fair access to land for peasants and new entrants.

Free Trade – In the past few years, EU countries have been aggressively targeted by transnational corporations regarding two major free trade deals: TTIP and CETA. Secrecy and

¹⁰ <http://www.fao.org/nr/tenure/voluntary-guidelines/en/>

haste have been hallmarks of EU governments' attitude regarding the negotiations around these FTAs. The content of both TTIP and CETA is anti-democratic and an unprecedented threat to the fundamental right to food. Such deals will give unlimited power to corporations ensuring them the legal and constitutional framework to eliminate the current rights of all Peoples and States.

These transatlantic deals are directly threatening our peasants. If the last international trade barriers are removed, European producers – already often producing below production costs – are at risk of having to abandon their farms. This would mean the end of our country sides. Signing the CETA and TTIP would have direct consequences on our food system, through the import of products not respectful of hygiene standards and traceability, measures that are protecting us from GMOs, growth hormones and pesticides that are authorized overseas. These trade deals would also have dire consequences for our fellow peasants overseas. Many other FTAs are being negotiated behind closed doors by the EU with several other countries and regions of the world. The consequences for small scale food producers are equally dramatic, on all sides of the agreement

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – The present European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the most important public policy on agriculture and food system in the EU, must be radically reformed. It was designed in the early 1960s to ensure the supply of food for European populations by providing farmers with decent prices and income, while maintaining reasonable prices for consumers, through intervention in the agriculture commodities' markets.. Through the reforms and in its current state, the CAP has abandoned its 'feeding function' to fit – and promote - economic globalization.

In the EU's public policies like the CAP, less of the 20% of available resources benefit small scale farmers, which represents almost the totality of European farms, while more than 80% of support goes to a handful of large holdings. We need a European agriculture policy defined by European civil society, not by corporate interests and the WTO; agricultural policies within the framework of Food Sovereignty.

In 2017 the process to reform the CAP has started. ECVC demands that the new CAP prioritize agricultural and rural employment. Young farmers must be seriously supported, to promote the *re-peasantization* of the continent. Farmers' right to save their seeds and to improve plant varieties has also to be guaranteed. The new CAP has to consider that farmers' income should firstly come from selling their products. Moving away from market intervention tools – called for by the liberal ideology – makes prices increasingly volatile and farmers' income uncertain, with no benefits for consumers.

Environmental Damage and social conditions are increasingly visible today, even as the European Union is struggling to bring about the necessary radical policy shift. The important

elections to be held in several European countries in the coming months should also address the debate on agriculture and food.

Migrant workers – The racist events of El Ejido (Almeria) in 2000 broke the wall of silence that reigned in Europe over living and working conditions under industrial greenhouses. In 2010, racialised violence against African seasonal workers were repeated in Rosarno (Italy, Calabria). ECVC's member organization in Andalucia (Spain), the SOC, began to develop an active campaign in defence of the region's seasonal workers, in coordination with other European organizations, like the Codetras in France. The Confédération Paysanne, in collaboration with ARI (Italian members of ECVC), began to organize field research missions by volunteers in various European countries. Two publications were published in 2011 and 2014/15, and a blog was created: www.agricultures-migrations.org

ECVC's role is fundamental in the denunciation of the situation of migrant workers, the defence of their rights and their self-organization, from a peasant perspective. We are doubly affected by the phenomenon of migration, wherein as peasants we are forced to abandon our livelihood and to migrate, and as rural workers, exploited in intensive and industrial farming systems. The prevailing system applies policies of segregation, competition and confrontations between workers, based on origin, nationality, administrative or labour status, gender, sexual orientation, race or social status.

It is necessary to implement strategies of broad alliances and creation of networks that break with this logic. ECVC is committed in this struggle. Some ECVC members are working together with labour unions to support the realization of autonomous organizations of agriculture wage workers, especially migrants. Generally speaking, in 5 years, the labour cost of wages workers has declined. In some large farms the decline is more than 20%.

Women – In Europe's rural areas, women are still victims of gender-based violence and find themselves in very precarious situations. Besides sexual and physical violations, peasant women, female agricultural workers and labour migrants, suffer structural discriminations related, for example, to gender based roles, access to resources and low participation in peasant organizations and unions. Women are still mostly associated with reproductive and care work. Often the physical and psychological abuse suffered by women is understood as "private family problems". In the short term, we must develop protective measures against gender-based violence that takes into account the harsh conditions of the victims living and working in rural areas. The Women's Articulation of the ECVC has been working to empower rural women and to learn from each other. Feminist debates are being reinforced, as well as a broader understanding of gender and sexual diversity in the rural areas, so we can tackle the structural gender violence we suffer and increase the impact we have also inside our own organizations and in the areas where we do our daily work.

Youth – Currently, in Europe, a farm disappears every 3 minutes and the average age of the peasantry is steadily increasing (about 60 years!). Young people from this continent, who want to start agriculture and live in rural areas face major challenges. We need urgent solutions here.. The *de-peasantization* of Europe goes hand-in-hand with the power and willingness of our youth to contribute to the *re-peasantization* of this continent.

Since Europe is currently the largest market for food imports around the world, young peasants understand that the restoration of peasant agricultural in Europe is fundamental for it to become a more sovereign continent and as part of the global struggle for food sovereignty. ECVC is therefore committed with the struggle of young peasants, to guarantee their access to resources (land, seeds, water, credits, markets...), to promote the democratization of sustainable agricultural knowledge in harmony with rural livelihoods in this continent and finally to promote agriculture by young people in Europe's rural areas.

-----*The examples cited above are just some of the key issues we at ECVC are working in, but they don't reflect the entirety of our work or concerns regarding agricultural issues and rural areas in Europe and the world.*

All these struggles (Land, Youth, Women, the Dairy Sector, Seeds, Migrant Workers, etc) have Food Sovereignty as their cross-cutting principle. Key to the international peasant movement, the concept of Food Sovereignty links the question of food production to power and democracy. Also in Europe, we are committed to placing territories at the heart of food systems and agricultural policies. Food sovereignty asserts people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food, produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, as well as their right to define their own food and agricultural systems. ECVC is committed with and leading the Food Sovereignty movement throughout Europe¹¹.

For more information please visit our website, or our Facebook or Twitter.

Website: www.eurovia.org

Facebook: ECVC – European Coordination Via Campesina¹²

Twitter-@ECVC1

¹¹ <http://www.eurovia.org/pan-european-forum-in-romania-wraps-up-food-sovereignty-takes-root-in-eastern-europe/>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/ECVC-European-Coordination-Via-Campesina-322102744638450/>

HISTORY OF EHNE BIZKAIA

EHNE Bizkaia is an agricultural trade union and social movement from the Basque Country. The union was formally set up in 1976 and was initially a territorial federation for the province of the same name within EHNE (Euskal Herriko Nekazarien Elkartasuna: Farmers' Association of the Basque Country). In 2010, EHNE Bizkaia became independent from the confederation, although it kept working in partnership with all other EHNE federations in the territory.

Its main objective is to promote food sovereignty based on local agroecological production that ensures safe and good quality food while respecting the environment and climate, providing jobs and dynamism to the rural areas.

EHNE Bizkaia defends a model of agricultural production linked to the earth and in harmony with the environment, which prioritizes quality over quantity and uses the lowest possible volume of inputs, avoiding the use of chemicals and seeking the highest level of autonomy in decision-making in agricultural and livestock farms. The aim is for food sovereignty to benefit both producers (i.e., the farming community) and local consumers.

Therefore, EHNE Bizkaia works to:

- Promote the direct sale of products as local and seasonal as possible
- Utilize and leverage the resources and outlets of each historical region: markets, fairs, etc.
- Strengthen alliances between different sectors, particularly among small businesses, farmers, and consumers
- Engage consumers to defend a local and agroecological model of production, reinstating trust in farmers.

Moreover, another core pillar of the work of EHNE Bizkaia is its training activities connected to supporting the establishment of young people in the rural world. The type of training fostered by the Union is fully agroecological, aimed at encouraging the defense and promotion of peasant, local and seasonal farming. Beyond the dissemination of purely technical aspects, training activities also aim to mobilize different social, cultural and rural women's groups in favor of food sovereignty.

As we already mentioned, EHNE Bizkaia's mission is to promote food sovereignty in the Basque Country, based on a model of agroecological farming.

This endeavor dates back from 1996, during the World Food Summit organized by FAO in Rome, when La Via Campesina (of which EHNE Bizkaia is a founding member) proposed Food Sovereignty as a political alternative to the prevailing industrial food and agricultural system

that is deeply unfair and “predatory”. At that time, the political concept of food sovereignty began to permeate the structure of the Union, which little by little became a local and State-wide champion of this notion.

The focus on food sovereignty implies a call for social transformation. It is not only about reflecting or creating theoretical knowledge, but about generating practical tools and transforming reality with a long-term vision. Agroecology is a process that involves a “transition”, and should allow different possibilities that help reach the final goal. This also implies a spirit of inclusion: the more actors that join and the more alliances that can be developed, the better.

ANNEXURE

For more information and background on La Vía Campesina's International Conferences and Women and Youth Assemblies, please see the following documents and videos:

1. Music Video for the VIIth Conference of La Via Campesina:
"If we sow solidarity we will harvest strength" (3 minutes)
www.bitly.com/song-of-solidarity
2. The Jakarta Call (Declaration from the VI Conference)
www.bitly.com/LVC-JakartaCall
3. LVC Annual Report 2015
www.bitly.com/LVC-AnnualReport-15-EN
3. Video from the VIth Conference: "The Jakarta Call" (38 minutes)
www.bitly.com/JakartaCall
4. Report from the VIth Conference
www.bitly.com/6-Conf-Report
5. Report from the IVth Women's Assembly (Jakarta 2013)
www.bitly.com/jakarta-womensassembly
6. Declaration from the IIIrd Youth Assembly (Jakarta 2013)
www.bitly.com/Jakarta-YouthAssembly