



Declaration of Rights of Peasants - Women and Men

La Via Campesina
International Peasant Movement

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Peasants of the World need an International Convention on the Rights of Peasants

I. Introduction

Almost half of the people in the world are peasants. Even in the high-tech world, people eat food produced by peasants. Small-scale agriculture is not just an economic activity; it means life for many people. The security of the population depends on the well-being of peasants and sustainable agriculture. To protect human life it is important to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of the peasants. In reality, the ongoing violations of peasants' rights threaten human life.

II. Violations of Peasants' Rights

- Millions of peasants have been forced to leave their farmland because of land grabs facilitated by national policies and/or the military. Land is taken away from peasants for the development of large industrial or infrastructure projects, extracting industries like mining, tourist resorts, special economic zones, supermarkets and plantations for cash crops. As a result, land is increasingly concentrated in a few hands.
- States neglect the farm sector and peasants receive inadequate income from their agriculture production.
- Monocultures for the production of agrofuels and other industrial uses are promoted in favor of agribusiness and transnational capital; this has devastating impacts on forests, water, the environment and the economic and social life of peasants.
- There is an increasing militarization and a number of armed conflicts in rural areas with severe impacts on the full realization of civil rights of peasants.
- As they lose their land, communities also lose their forms of self-government, sovereignty and cultural identity.
- Food is increasingly used for speculation purposes.
- The peasants' struggle is criminalised.
- Slave labor, forced labor and child labor are still found in rural areas.
- Women's and children's rights are the most affected. Women are victims of psychological, physical and economic violence. They are discriminated in their access to land and productive resources, and marginalized in decision making.
- Peasants have lost many local seeds. Biodiversity is destroyed by the use of chemical fertilizers, hybrid seeds and genetically modified organisms developed by the transnational corporations.
- Access to health services and to education is decreasing in rural areas and peasants' political role in society is undermined.

- As a result of these violations of peasants' rights, today millions of peasants live in hunger and suffer malnutrition. This is not because there is not enough food in the world, but because food resources are dominated by transnational corporations. Peasants are forced to produce for export instead of producing food for their communities.
- The crisis in the agricultural sector causes migration and the massive displacement and disappearance of peasants and indigenous people.

III. The policies of neo-liberalism worsen the violations of Peasants' Rights

The violations of peasants' rights are on the rise because of the implementation of neoliberal policies promoted by the World Trade Organisation, Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), other institutions and many governments in the North as well as in the South. The WTO and FTAs force the opening of markets and prevent countries from protecting and supporting their domestic agriculture. They push for the deregulation in the agriculture sector.

Governments of developed countries and transnational corporations are responsible for trade dumping practices. Cheap subsidised food floods local markets thus forcing peasants out of business.

The WTO and other institutions force the introduction of food such as GMOs and the unsafe use of growth hormones in meat production. Meanwhile, they prohibit the marketing of healthy products produced by peasants through sanitary barriers.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has implemented structural adjustment programs (SAPs) leading to massive cuts in subsidies for agriculture and social services. Countries have been forced to privatize state companies and to dismantle support mechanisms in the agricultural sector.

National and international policies directly or indirectly give priority to transnational corporations or food production and trade. TNCs also practice biopiracy and destroy genetic resources and biodiversity cultivated by peasants. The capitalist logic of accumulation has dismantled peasant agriculture.

IV. The struggle of the Peasants to uphold and protect their Rights

Facing these realities, peasants all over the world are struggling to live. All over the world, thousands of peasant leaders are being arrested because they are fighting to protect their rights and livelihood. They are being brought to court by unfair justice systems, incidents of massacre, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, and political persecution and harassment are common.

The global food crisis in 2008 precipitated and exacerbated by policies and transnational corporations (which unilaterally act according to their own self-interest) clearly shows the failure in promoting, respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights

of peasants. This affects all people in the world, in developed and developing countries. While peasants work hard to ensure the sustainability of seeds and food, the violation of the rights of peasants damages the world's capability to feed itself.

The struggle of the Peasants is fully applicable to the framework of international human rights which includes instruments, and thematic mechanisms of the Human Rights Council, that address the right to food, housing rights, access to water, right to health, human rights defenders, indigenous peoples, racism and racial discrimination, women's rights. These international instruments of the UN do not completely cover nor prevent human rights violations, especially the rights of the peasants. We see some limitations in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as an instrument to protect peasants' right. Also, the Charter of the Peasant-produced by the UN in 1978, was not able to protect peasants from international liberalization policies. The other international conventions, which also deal with peasants' rights, can not be implemented either. These conventions include: ILO Convention 169, Clause 8-J Convention on Biodiversity, Point 14.60 Agenda 21, and Cartagena Protocol.

V. The Peasants need an International Convention on the Rights of Peasants

Because of the limitations of those conventions and resolutions, it is important to create an international instrument to respect, protect, fulfill, and uphold peasants' rights -- the International Convention on the Rights of Peasants (ICRP). There are already conventions to protect vulnerable groups of people, such as indigenous peoples, women, children and migrant workers. The ICRP will articulate the values of the rights of peasants, which will have to be respected, protected and fulfilled by governments and international institutions. The ICRP will be supplemented by optional protocols to ensure its implementation.

During the Regional Conference on Peasants' Rights in April 2002, Via Campesina formulated the Declaration of the Rights of Peasants through the process of a series of activities, including the Workshop on Peasants' Rights in Medan North Sumatra on 2000, the Conference of Agrarian Reform in Jakarta April 2001, the Regional Conference on Peasants' Rights held in Jakarta in April 2002 and the International Conference of Via Campesina also held in Jakarta, in June 2008. The text of the declaration is attached to this document. It should form the basis of the ICRP, to be elaborated by the United Nations, with the full participation of Via Campesina and other representatives of civil society.

We are looking forward to the support of the people who are concerned with the peasants' struggle and the promotion and protection of the rights of peasants.

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Peasants of the World need an International Declaration on the Rights of Peasants

The Declaration

Affirming that peasants, men and women, are equal to all other people and, in the exercise of their rights, should be free from any form of discrimination, including discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, wealth, birth or other status,

Acknowledging that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, affirm the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, civil, cultural, economic, political and social,

Emphasizing that in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States have undertaken to ensure the realization of the right to an adequate standard of living for ourselves and our family, including the right to food, and our right to be free from hunger through the genuine agrarian reform,

Emphasizing that according to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, all Indigenous peoples, including peasants, have the right to self-determination and that by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development, having the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions,

Recalling that many peasants all over the world have fought throughout history for the recognition of the rights of peasants and for just and free societies,

Considering that the current agricultural conditions threaten the lives of peasants, worsening the environment, decreasing peasants' productivity and decreasing the livelihood of the peasants,

Considering that peasants' conditions are worsening because of governments' exclusion of peasants from policy decision making, because of the use of military, and/or paramilitary groups to displace peasants and allowing transnational corporations to exploit natural resources,

Considering that capitalist globalization imposed through some international agreements has had a strong negative impact on the peasant sector,

Considering that peasants struggle with their own resources and with other groups who support the peasants' demands for life, environmental protection and increasing productivity

Considering the increasing concentration of the food systems in the world in the hands of few transnational corporations

Considering that peasants constitute a specific social group which is vulnerable so that the realization of the rights of peasants require special measures to truly respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of peasants enshrined in international human rights law;

Acknowledging that small-scale peasant agriculture, fishing, livestock rearing can contribute to mitigate the climate crisis and to secure a sustainable food production for all;

Reminding States to comply with and effectively implement all their obligations as they apply to peasants under international instruments, in particular those related to human rights, in consultation and cooperation with the peasants,

Believing that this Declaration is an essential step forward the recognition, promotion and protection of the rights and freedoms of peasants, including the elaboration and adoption of an International Convention on the Rights of Peasants,

Recognizing and reaffirming that peasants are entitled without discrimination to all human rights recognized in international law,

Solemnly adopts the following Declaration on the Rights of Peasants:

Article I

Definition of peasants: rights holders

A peasant is a man or woman of the land, who has a direct and special relationship with the land and nature through the production of food and/or other agricultural products. Peasants work the land themselves, rely above all on family labour and other small-scale forms of organizing labour. Peasants are traditionally embedded in their local communities and they take care of local landscapes and of agro-ecological systems.

The term peasant can apply to any person engaged in agriculture, cattle-raising, pastoralism, handicrafts-related to agriculture or a related occupation in a rural area. This includes Indigenous people working on the land.

The term peasant also applies to landless. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO 1984) definition[1], the following categories of people are considered to be landless and are likely to face difficulties in ensuring their livelihood:

1. Agricultural labour households with little or no land;
2. Non-agricultural households in rural areas, with little or no land, whose members are engaged in various activities such as fishing, making crafts for the local market, or providing services;
3. Other rural households of pastoralists, nomads, peasants practising shifting cultivation, hunters and gatherers, and people with similar livelihoods.

Article II

Rights of peasants

1. Women peasants and men peasants have equal rights.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law.
3. Peasants (women and men) are free and equal to all other people and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular to be free from discriminations based on their economic, social and cultural status.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to actively participate in policy design, decision making, implementation, and monitoring of any project, program or policy affecting their territories.

Article III

Right to life and to an adequate standard of living

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to physical integrity, to not be harassed, evicted, persecuted, arbitrarily arrested, and killed for defending their rights.
2. Women peasants have the right to be protected from domestic violence(physical, sexual, verbal an psychological)
3. . Women have the right to control their own bodies and to reject the use of their bodies for commercial purposes. All forms of human (women and girls) trafficking are inhuman and have to be condemned.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to live in dignity.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to adequate, healthy, nutritious, and affordable food, and to maintain their traditional food cultures.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Therefore, they have the right to have access to health services and medicine, even when they live in remote areas. They also have the right to use and develop traditional medicine.

7. Peasants (women and men) have the right to live a healthy life, and not be affected by the contamination of agrochemicals (such as chemical pesticides and fertilisers that are creating fertility problems and contaminating breast milk).
8. Peasant (women and men) have the right to decide about the number of children they want to have, and about the contraceptive methods they want to use.
9. Peasants (women and men) have the right to the full realization of their sexual and reproductive rights.
10. Peasants (women and men) have the right to safe water, transportation, electricity, communication and leisure.
11. Peasants (women and men) have the right to education and training.
12. Peasants (women and men) have the right to an adequate income to fulfill their basic needs and those of their families.
13. Peasants (women and men) have the right to adequate housing and clothing.
14. Peasants (women and men) have the right to consume their own agricultural production and to use this to satisfy their families' basic needs, and the right to distribute their agriculture production to other people.
15. The right of peasants (women and men) to life and the fulfillment of their basic needs should be protected by the law and by the state, with the assistance and cooperation of others, without discrimination of any kind.

Article IV

Right to land and territory

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to own land, collectively or individually, for their housing and farming.
2. Peasants (women and men) and their families have the right to toil on their own land, and to produce agricultural products, to rear livestock, to hunt and gather, and to fish in their territories
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to toil and own the non-productive state land on which they depend for their livelihood.
4. Peasants(women and men) have the right to safe water and adequate sanitation.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to water for irrigation and agricultural production in sustainable production systems controlled by local communities.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to manage the water resources in their region.
7. Peasants (women and men) have the right to support, by way of facilities, technology and funds, from the state to manage the water resources.
8. Peasants (women and men) have the right to manage, conserve, and benefit from the forests.
9. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject all kinds of land acquisition and conversion for economic purpose.
10. Peasants (women and men) have the right to security of tenure and not to be forcibly evicted from their lands and territories.
11. Peasants (women and men) have the right to agricultural land that can be irrigated to ensure food sovereignty for growing population.

12. Peasants (women and men) have the right to benefit from land reform. Latifundia must not be allowed. Land has to fulfill its social function. Land ceilings to land ownership should be introduced whenever necessary in order to ensure an equitable access to land.
13. Peasants (women and men) have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.

Article V

Right to seeds and traditional agricultural knowledge and practice

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to determine the varieties of the seeds they want to plant.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject varieties of the plant which they consider to be dangerous economically, ecologically, and culturally.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject the industrial model of agriculture.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to conserve and develop their local knowledge in agriculture, fishing, livestock rearing.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to use the agriculture, fishing, livestock rearing facilities.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to choose their own products, varieties, amount, quality and the ways of farming, fishing, livestock rearing, individually or collectively.
7. Peasants (women and men) have the right to use their own technology or the technology they choose guided by the principle of protecting human health and environmental conservation.
8. Peasants (women and men) have the right to grow and develop their peasants varieties and to exchange, to give or to sell their seeds
9. Peasants (women and men) have the right to food sovereignty.

Article VI

Right to means of agricultural production

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain funds from the State to develop agriculture.
2. Peasants (women and men) should have access to credit for their agricultural activity.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain the materials and tools for agriculture.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to water for irrigation and agricultural production in sustainable production systems controlled by local communities.

5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to transportation, drying, and storage facilities in marketing their products.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to be actively involved in planning, formulating, and deciding on the budget for national and local agriculture.

Article VII

Right to information and agriculture technology

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain impartial and balanced information about capital, market, policies, prices, technology, etc, related to peasants' needs.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain information about national and international policies.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain technical assistance, production tools and other appropriate technology to increase their productivity, in ways that respect their social, cultural and ethical values.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to full and impartial information about goods and services, and to decide what and how they want to produce and consume.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain adequate information at the national and international levels on the preservation of genetic resources.

Article VIII

Freedom to determine price and market for agricultural production

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to prioritize their agricultural production for their families and societies' needs.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to store their production to ensure the satisfaction of their basic needs and those of their families.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to foster traditional local markets.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to get beneficial price for their production.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to determine the price, individually or collectively.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to get a fair payment for their work, to fulfill their basic needs and those of their families.
7. Peasants (women and men) have the right to get a fair price for their production.
8. Peasants (women and men) have the right to a fair system of evaluation of the quality of their product, nationally and/or internationally.
9. Peasants (women and men) have the right to develop community-based commercialization systems in order to guarantee food sovereignty.

Article IX

Right to the protection of agriculture values

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to the recognition and protection of their culture and local agriculture values.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to develop and preserve local knowledge in agriculture.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject interventions that can destroy local agricultural values.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to be respected for their spirituality as individuals and as peoples.

Article X

Right to biological diversity

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to the protection and preservation of biological diversity.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to plant, develop and conserve biological diversity, individually or collectively.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject patents threatening biological diversity, including on plants, food and medicine.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject intellectual property rights of goods, services, resources and knowledge that are owned, maintained, discovered, developed or produced by the local community. They can not be forced to implement those intellectual property rights.
5. Peasants (women and men), individually or collectively, have the right to maintain, exchange, and preserve genetic and biological diversity as the richness of resources from the local community and the indigenous community.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject certification mechanisms established by transnational corporations. Local guarantee schemes run by peasants' organizations with government support should be promoted and protected.

Article XI

Right to preserve the environment

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to a clean and healthy environment.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to preserve the environment according to their knowledge.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject all forms of exploitation which cause environmental damage.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to sue and claim compensation for environmental damage.

5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reparation for ecological debt and the historic and current dispossession of their territories.

Article XII

Freedoms of association, opinion and expression

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to freedom of association with others, and to express their opinion, in accordance with traditions and culture, including through claims, petitions, and mobilizations, at the local, regional, national and international levels.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to form and join independent peasants' organizations, trade unions, cooperatives, or any other organizations or associations, for the protection of their interests.
3. Peasants (women and men), individually or collectively, have the right to expression in their local customs, languages, local culture, religions, cultural literature and local art.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right not to be criminalized for their claims and struggles.
5. Peasants (women and men) have to right to resist oppression and to resort to peaceful direct action in order to protect their rights

Article XIII

Right to have access to justice

1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to effective remedies in case of violations of their rights. They have the right to a fair justice system, to have effective and non-discriminatory access to courts and to have legal aid.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right not to be criminalized for their claims and struggles.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to be informed and to legal assistance.

To have a proper Convention, there is a need to include chapters/parts on “state obligation” and “monitoring mechanism or mechanisms related to measures”, and other provisions similar to other international conventions.

