

On the occasion of the international summit of agriculture ministers at the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture on January 21st in Berlin, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (AbL), the human rights organisation FIAN, Bread for the World and the international peasants movement La Via Campesina handed over a protest note to German Federal Minister of Agriculture Cem Özdemir.

Chengeto Muzira, smallholder farmer from Zimbabwe and youth member of the International Coordination Committee of LVC told the German Agriculture Minister about the resilience of the indigenous seeds system in her country, about the importance of the promotion of agroecology and food sovereignty. She urged the Cem Özdemir to put human rights in the center of agriculture policies and to implement UNDROP.

### **Talking Points of Chengeto on Seeds, Food Sovereignty and UNDROP.**

Dear Minister, dear all,

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to share with you about our context in Zimbabwe. In southern African countries, we have many people in the countryside. People still produce food to feed our communities, instead of food commodities.

In my country, Zimbabwe, which had a land reform in 2000, commercial farming is very small. Peasant farming uses a lot of saved indigenous seeds, mostly millet and sorghum, essential ingredients of our traditional sadza (porridge). Each household and community has its own indigenous seed banks, which are complementary to the national gene bank. Such a decentralized system is very resilient to crises.

Maize, soy beans, and wheat are the only crops which rely on commercial hybrid seeds. But please note, GMOs are totally banned in Zimbabwe! And this must remain!

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the unusual circumstances associated with it, many laws are being changed without consultation. There has been a significant push for Zimbabwean government to open up the market for GMOs. The Plant Breeders' Rights Act is an example – this was pushed through in August 2020. The Government says that this doesn't impact farmers' rights. However, these seed laws and intellectual property rights legislation weaken farmers' seed systems which are the basis of diverse, healthy food and farmer resilience in the face of climate change, undermining social justice and good governance.

Seed biopiracy occurs when rich people and corporations steal local seeds and commercialize them to make profits. This stealing is done through buying local and national gene banks and all the related research facilities. With access to local seeds, patents are developed which make the seeds less accessible to the farmers, particularly for peasants and other smallholder farmers.

Also, in our neighbour countries like Kenya, Zambia and South Africa, we see the introduction and acceleration of Western policies related to lifting the bans on GMOs.

In South Africa, there is a large commercial farming sector and well-developed industrial food system. A variety of GMO and hybrid seeds are grown, consumed, and traded. There is a big challenge for peasant seed systems because seeds are protected by laws.

In Zambia, the new government has opened agriculture to large-scale commercial farming. Most white farmers who lost farms during the land reform moved to Zambia and are growing maize seed and other crops to supply the region through SeedCo. There is a possibility that GMOs could be allowed there in the near future, as Zambia seeks to attract investments into agriculture. However, there is a big rural smallholder farming sector which continues to rely on traditional seeds and knowledge to produce food. In Kenya, the recent government tried to allow growing of GMOs, but our member KPL (Kenyan Peasant League) challenged this in the high court. The ban on GMOs currently stands. Peasants still grow food using traditional methods.

We can safely say that in Africa we see an increase in the erosion of peasants' seed and land rights and access to water in general. This erosion was initiated following the global food price crisis back in 2008 by various powerful actors, such as the G8's New Alliance for Food security and Nutrition in Africa, the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), and others. There has been visible and widespread land grabbing by foreign interests in many African countries, which has led to the dispossession and displacement of hundreds of thousands rural peasants. The less visible effects are related to the ongoing reforms of Seed Acts and other policies to align them to UPOV 91 (the 1991 Act of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants Convention) to promote big seed industries and to move towards the criminalization of peasant-saved seed systems, undermining the rights of peasants.

I warn you: Deregulating the GMO laws in Europe will have even greater impacts in our peasant systems and in the food security of African population. Please make sure this doesn't happen, Mr. Minister! Please make sure that the GFFA declaration is crystal clear on this.

### **What are we calling for as La Via Campesina's youth?**

As young farmers of La Via Campesina, we recall that the peasants produce over 70% of food consumed globally. We, therefore, call on the governments to urgently put in place policies based in human rights to support our communities, improving infrastructure in the countryside, increasing the availability, accessibility, and sustainability of food, and facilitating access to public rural financial services, such as credit and financing, which would allow investment in agroecological production, promoting increased land productivity and labor.

It is essential to promote and protect the rights of peasant farmers and agricultural workers. Therefore, Mr. Minister, the UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) approved by the United Nations in 2018 must be implemented also by the German government. This would be key to building and

protecting food sovereignty, which is our way of life and the way to guaranteeing a fair and just future for all of us in this planet. We urgently ask you to make sure that the UNDROP is highlighted this year's Declaration of the GFFA.