

MBOUR DECLARATION ON LAND GRABBING IN AFRICA

We participants, drawn from 25 countries from four continents (Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America) representing various Catholic Development Organizations and Networks and their allies;

gathered in Mbour, Senegal from 6th to 9th February at the workshop on “Land Grabbing in Africa – Dangers and Challenges”, on the occasion of the World Social Forum 2011;

CONCERNED with the recent phenomenon of land grabbing across Africa, Asia and Latin America, which consists in massive land transfer from local communities¹ to individual and/or corporate local and foreign interests for the purpose of agrofuels production, production of crops for export, extraction of natural resources and capital speculation;

CONVINCED that land is a gift from God and a common good entrusted to us by past generations for our use, and holding this in trust for generations yet unborn;

CONVINCED that land should be viewed not as a mere commodity for profit making but rather as territory in which is inscribed our culture, our identity and the source of our sustenance;

REACHING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING that land grabbing in Africa is unleashing life-threatening negative consequences on African communities including the displacement of populations, aggravation of poverty and hunger, generating increase of conflicts, loss of land rights and livelihoods, undermining food sovereignty, and irreversible environmental degradation;

CONSIDERING land grabbing as a violation of human rights and that all farming families are entitled to land for a dignified livelihood;

BELIEVING that this phenomenon must be stopped and that this requires alliance building, networking and concerted efforts by local communities, civil society, international organisations and faith-based organisations, as well as governments;

WE HEREBY,

DEMAND OF OUR GOVERNMENTS TO

1. provide legal recognition for, and protection to customary land and natural resource rights of the people and ensure equitable access to land for farming families, pastoralists and indigenous communities;

1 Being aware of the highly different rural settings, the term 'local communities' refers to smallholder farmers/ farming families, pastoralists, fisherfolks and indigenous groups.

2. facilitate prior, transparent consultations with local communities for all projects that affect their livelihoods as required by the African Union land policy guidelines;
3. respect, protect and fulfil its obligations under international human rights law, especially under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 8), UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Articles 1,2,11), UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 1,2) and to enforce its Extra-territorial Obligations under these treaties;
4. avoid wholesale subscribing to the various on-going international processes (such as Economic Partnership Agreements/Free Trade Agreements, Principles on Responsible Agricultural Investment lead by the World Bank, Carbon Trading), given that these tend to promote the interests of agrobusiness, extractive industries and speculators to the detriment of local populations and farming families;
5. implement the recommendations of the International Assessment of Agriculture, Science, Technology for Development (IAASTD) that set-out a comprehensive package of policy options to reorient local and global food systems towards greater social equity and sustainability;

RECOMMEND TO THE CHURCH TO

1. denounce land contracts that violate human rights as illegal and illegitimate;
2. integrate land questions into evangelisation, supported by the theology of land, and prioritise land issues in pastoral work, especially in the work of Caritas and Justice and Peace Commissions and at all levels;
3. strengthen linkages and deepen trust with local communities through closer consultations, and stand by these communities in times of challenges;
4. closely monitor the implementation of the African Union Land Policy and popularise the implementation of propositions 22, 29 and 30 on land by the Second Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa;

INVITE OTHER RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS AND PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL TO

share in our reflections on the right to land and share their thoughts on these issues, and defend the rights of communities to land and food;

RECOMMEND TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS TO

1. deepen consultations with local communities in order to promote bottom-up processes that will offer Civil Society Organisations better insights into the concerns of these communities and to give legitimacy to their work with them;

2. strengthen linkages between Southern Civil Society Organisations and their Northern counterparts in order to support local communities in the south in the fight against land grabbing, and highlight key challenges thereof;

DEMAND OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO

support Governments and Civil Society Organisations in the pursuit of genuine alternative agrarian reforms which put the rights of farming families at the centre and promote agro-ecological farming systems which are more sustainable than current agribusiness models;

WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO

1. challenge and condemn the myth that there is “unused” or “unowned” land in Africa, as well as the win-win rhetoric;
2. build alliances and networks that will enable us develop clear media and communication strategies that would provide visibility to both the successes and challenges and struggles of the local communities;
3. lobby and pressurize Governments to give legal recognition to customary land rights of local communities and implement programmes that facilitate their access to land ;
4. promote sustainable family farming, the strengthening of local food systems in line with recommendations of the IAASTD.

5. CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE TO ENSURE THAT AFRICA SHOULD NEVER FACE A GENOCIDE DUE TO LAND GRABBING!