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Rafael Correa, president of Ecuador (center in white shirt) at the May 2008 Latin American and Caribbean "Presidential Summit for Food Sovereignty and Security: Food for Life," held in Nicaragua.

Opening the Door to Food Sovereignty in Ecuador

BY KARLA PEÑA

In an unprecedented move, Ecuador established Food Sovereignty in their new constitution, in September of this year. Now work has begun to draft a Food Sovereignty Law for possible approval in February. The constitution aims to promote food sovereignty by transforming the national agro-food system; introducing organic and ecological technologies for sustainable agricultural production, adopting fiscal and redistributive policies to increase resources for farmers, protect the national economy from food import dependency, and prohibit the use of biotechnology and genetically-modified seeds harmful to human and environmental health.

The draft law will conserve agricultural, wild and genetic biodiversity by declaring their land free of genetically engineered (GE) seeds and crops. Extraction of non-renewable resources is prohibited in protected areas, and production of monocultures will be avoided for rehabilitation of the soil. The state will also protect the intellectual property of collective work based on national biodiversity and begin to recognize the Rights of Nature (Article 71-74).

Food Sovereignty in Ecuador

The Agrarian Roundtable, composed of national and international non-governmental organizations (NGO's) participated in drafting the food sovereignty section of the Constitution. The majority of the Roundtable's proposals were implemented by the National Assembly in the new Constitution. Community-based organizations in Ecuador had significant influence in shaping this public policy because of civil participation in the legislative process. The National Confederation of Farmers, Indigenous and Afro Ecuatorian Organizations (FENO-

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The Institute for Food and Development Policy—known as Food First—is a member-supported, nonprofit “peoples’” think tank and education-for-action center. Our work highlights the root causes and value-based solutions to hunger and poverty around the world, with a commitment to establishing food as a fundamental human right.

There never was a better time to end hunger—equitably, sustainably, and permanently

On November 4th, a groundswell of enthusiasm and goodwill opened a door toward a brighter future for our nation and the world. President-elect Barack Obama put it succinctly in his acceptance speech when he said, “*This victory alone is not the change we seek. It is only the chance for us to make that change.*”

It’s been many years since we have had a convergence of good will, support, and the political conditions to make the changes we need in our broken food system. We can face down the global economic recession and end the injustices that cause hunger. How?

By putting the food crisis squarely on the U.S. public agenda now before we face even more hunger and food riots. During these times of financial crisis, we need to build the political will and establish the policies to turn our food systems into engines for local economic development. This is why Food First, together with 60 other groups, formed the U.S. Working Group on the Food Crisis and launched a “Call to Action” on World Food Day 2008. This “Call to Action” kicked off a campaign to link and amplify the voices of the thousands of grassroots organizations across the nation struggling for food justice, food sovereignty and sustainable livelihoods. We have been building our expertise, our networks and our food system alternatives for years. There was never a better time to act—yes we can!

No one knows how the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression will turn out. Food prices and farmer input costs have skyrocketed despite record harvests. Then with the financial crisis on the heels of the food crisis, grain prices plunged and farm credit dried up. Meanwhile, grain rots in foreign ports and—in the face of record agribusiness profits—one in six people on earth is going hungry.

No wonder people around the world are rebelling against this unjust global food system. No wonder they are deciding that they can’t count on global food trade. And why they are turning more and more to growing local food for local consumers. Though called a “silent tsunami” by the World Food program, the global food crisis is anything but silent—and as long as we are aware of its true causes, we are not helpless. We can weather the recession by building greater resiliency into our local food systems, here in the U.S. and in communities around the world.

Unfortunately, it appears that President-elect Barack Obama is considering Tom Vilsack (Governor of Iowa and HUGE supporter of Monsanto) for agriculture secretary of USDA. (See http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_15573.cfm). This appointment will take us down the wrong road in our food system. Equally as unfortunate, USDA and World Bank proposals call for more of the same failed policies that caused the crisis in the first place—more free trade and more Green Revolutions (now read: gene revolutions).

The good news is that we already have successful alternatives ready and working... sustainable family farms, neighborhood food systems, CSAs, food policy councils, farmers markets, and fair trade relationships that we have

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Food and Financial Crises

The food and financial crises are wrecking havoc on an increasingly vulnerable world. As the crisis unfolds, over 1 billion people will go hungry this year, and up to three billion—half the population of the planet—will become food insecure. Government bailouts amount to trillions of dollars (and counting) worldwide, but have yet to stem the bloodletting in the financial sector or turn the tide of hunger.

After a dramatic rise in food and commodity prices (corn, wheat, rice, soy) earlier this year, prices have now crashed with the global recession. The financial crash has not “solved” the food crisis; it has made it worse. The crash hasn’t made food any cheaper for most of the world’s poor, with farmers now caught in an economic tailspin of tight credit and increasing costs for seed and fertilizer.

Will we respond to prevent future wild swings in prices or simply wait for the next round of riots sparked by starvation? Aside from a general recognition that speculation played a role in the dramatic rise in food prices, little has been done to address the destructive profit-seeking synergy of financial institutions and agri-foods corporations. While calls for re-regulation of global finance capital rightfully address the criminality of speculating with food, they

do nothing to address the corporate monopolization of the food system, nor do they recognize the financial consolidation taking place among food, fuel and finance systems.

The synergistic strategies and mechanisms ensuring monopoly power within the food and finance systems are remarkable. Northern agri-foods corporations rely on the WTO to open new markets while northern taxpayer-financed subsidies allow them to sell their products at prices below the cost of production, thus eliminating local competition abroad. The Wall Street financial houses are now pushing to finalize the WTO’s Doha round to gain access to India, China and Brazil’s financial markets with the assistance of trillion-dollar taxpayer subsidies (bailouts) in order to assert their financial dominance.

In the public eye, the food crisis—still deepening despite the burst of the commodities bubble—has now been eclipsed by the financial crises. As the financial crisis spreads to the “real economy” the impacts on the food system will be severe, especially for those at risk of hunger and food insecurity. There is a danger in thinking that simply regulating the finance sector to prevent speculation will solve the food crisis. The truth is speculation simply exacerbated a longer-term trend in rising

grain prices due to agrofuels expansion and corporate monopolization. Before the twin crises, there were already 850 million hungry worldwide with 35 million food insecure in the United States. These numbers have risen to one billion and 50 million, respectively. While it is essential to control speculation in the food system, this is only the first step in fixing the problem—not the last.

How can we break the boom and bust cycles of monopoly/finance capital within the food system? What kinds of resilience do we need to build into our food systems to allow the world’s poor majority to weather this global economic depression? Can our food systems become engines for local economic development? Can they provide leverage for wider systems changes?

We can start by supporting Ecuador’s bold decision to establish national food sovereignty as part of its constitution. We can abolish the Doha round and take agriculture out of the WTO. We can localize our food systems—protecting them from the wild boom and bust swings in the global market. We can establish local and national grain reserves. We can put a moratorium on agrofuels. These are all transformational—and essential—steps necessary to ensure the right to food.

There never was a better time to end hunger...

been forging for decades. We also have both seasoned and enthusiastic young advocates chipping away at the reckless power of international finance institutions, holding governments accountable, and advocating for food sovereignty in national and international arenas.

Advancing both favorable policies and multiplying successful local and regional systems to grow and deliver food can green the earth, promote better health, and build stronger community ties in this time of economic crisis. Your time is now! Work directly to advance local alterna-

tives, but also mobilize nationally, by pressuring President Obama to appoint a secretary of agriculture who is not in the pocket of the corporations that got us into this mess in the first place. Contact President-elect Obama at www.change.gov

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CIN) is an inter-cultural, interdisciplinary, community-based movement working towards an equitable Agrarian Reform in Ecuador. FENOCIN and other organizations hold open forums to gather knowledge and inquiries from the people. The information is formulated into a proposal and distributed to legislative representatives or working roundtables.

FENOCIN representatives, along with other members of the Agrarian Roundtable, are currently working on proposals to implement the Food Sovereignty Law. These organizations have proposed creating a National Council on Food Sovereignty to democratize the process of drafting legislation and implementing of Food Sovereignty. They also want the government to define tenancy and create a National Land Fund to aid in distributing productive

resources, including land. Expropriation would only take place in lands not serving their social function. What they are proposing is similar to the land laws in Brazil which have allowed the MST Landless Workers Movement to continue to organize.

Moving Food Sovereignty from the constitution into practice will still take considerable effort from the grassroots. Galo Chiriboga, who negotiated the Ecuador/U.S. free trade agreement, and has no agricultural experience, has been appointed to write up the government proposals for food sovereignty. The government has solicited Maria Yumbra, a member of Latin American Scientific Society of Agroecology, to help draft and introduce the concept of Agroecology into the Food Sovereignty Law. However, there is no guarantee that the government will accept her draft.

Inter-cultural solidarity, the formation of grassroots movements, and community involvement in legislation, together led to the resurrection of human rights in Ecuador and provides a universal reminder of the valuable role of civic activism. This first ever food sovereignty language in a national constitution is an incredible opening, one that will require activism from below as it now moves into the thorny stages of implementation.

Translated Version of Ecuador's Constitution — Food Sovereignty Regime <http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/2301>

Confederation of Farmers, Indigenous and Afro Ecuadorian Organizations www.fenocin.org

Agrarian Roundtable and Food Sovereignty in Ecuador — Spanish Documentary http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7arkj_si-la-soberania-alimentaria_news

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