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THE WORLD FOOD SUMMIT:

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Why do more than 800 million people still go hungry in a world marked by incredible affluence?

The governments of the world met in Rome from June 10 to 13 to address just that question, at a meeting titled “World Food Summit: Five Years Later.” At the 1996 World Food Summit, also held in Rome, 185 nations signed a commitment to halve the number of hungry people by 2015. Cuban President Fidel Castro made waves at the 1996 summit—and echoed the feelings of many—when he called that goal “shameful” for its abandonment of any notion of eliminating hunger. But subsequent trends have been more shameful still. The total reduction in global hunger achieved between 1996 and 2001 was only one-third of what would have been needed to stay on track to meet the ‘96 summit goals. In fact, poverty and hunger have actually worsened in two-thirds of Third World nations and in most Northern countries as well. While official documents prepared for this summit decried a “lack of will” and called for “more resources” to be directed at reducing hunger, the fact is that more fundamental changes are needed.

Research carried out by Food First reveals that since 1996, governments have presided over a set of policies that have conspired to undercut peasant, small, and family farmers and farm cooperatives in nations both North and South. These policies have included:

- Runaway trade liberalization, pitting family farmers in the Third World against the most heavily subsidized corporate farms in the North
- Forcing Third World countries to eliminate price supports and subsidies for food producers, while the U.S. and Europe maintain massive subsidies to corporate



FAO photo

Food First's Peter Rosset speaks at the Multi-Stakeholder Dialog that was part of the World Food Summit.

farmers, virtually excluding their own family farmers—witness the recent U.S. Farm Bill

- The privatization of credit and of technical and marketing assistance for family farmers
- The excessive promotion of export crops to the detriment of food crops
- The patenting of crop genetic resources by corporations who charge farmers for their use
- Agricultural research that is biased toward expensive and questionable technologies like genetic engineering while virtually ignoring pro-poor alternatives like organic farming and agroecology.

The worst hunger in the world is found in rural areas where the landless are the poorest of the poor, yet governments have dragged their feet in implementing already existing land reform and land redistribution policies, and have by and large—and sometimes

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FOOD FIRST empowers people to address the root cause of hunger, poverty, and environmental decline. Our research and educational materials reveal how antidemocratic institutions and belief systems promote hunger and environmental destruction.

WORLD FOOD SUMMIT

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forcibly—resisted efforts by peoples organizations (including movements of the landless) to push the implementation of these policies. These same governments have stood by as land has increasingly been turned into a commercial asset out of reach of the poor, and watched passively as business interests—both agricultural (e.g., plantations) and nonagricultural (e.g., petroleum exploration)—have encroached on communal and public lands and on the territories of indigenous peoples.

Unfortunately, the world's governments, variously led, cajoled, and blackmailed by the U.S. delegation, signed a declaration at the recent summit that was even worse than the pathetic 1996 goal of halving hunger. The Bush administration got its way on everything except a diluted version of the Right to Food—the administration wanted no reference to food as a human right, but ended up accepting a weak plan to develop “voluntary guidelines” over the next two years. America's calls for more trade liberalization and structural adjustment and a greater role for private corporations, and its highlighting of crop biotechnology, all got into the official declaration, which basically called for more business as usual.

While governments seem blind to the ways in which their policies enforce hunger and impoverishment for hundreds of millions of people, others clearly see the harsh reality. The social movements and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—including Food First—that attended the recent summit expressed collective disappointment about the final official declaration. In our own final declaration,^{*} we stated that

Far from analyzing and correcting the problems that have made it impossible to make progress toward eliminating hunger over the past five years, this new plan of action compounds the error of more of the same failed medicine with destructive prescriptions that will make the situation even worse... On the basis of this plan of action, no amount of political will or resources will lead to a major reduction in hunger or the poverty that underlies it.

Instead we called for a policy of “Food Sovereignty.”

Food Sovereignty is the RIGHT of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food, and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances... Food Sovereignty means the primacy of peoples' and communities' rights to food and food production, over trade concerns. This entails the support and promotion of local markets and producers over production for export and food imports.

If history has proven one thing, it is that there is no substitute for locally produced food when it comes to preventing hunger. When the poor gain access to productive resources like land, water, and forests, ending hunger no longer depends on the vagaries of the world market, access to foreign exchange, and superpower goodwill. When there are policies in place that favor—rather than undercut—family farming, then small farmers actually prosper. That is what the fight for food sovereignty is all about.

^{*} See the full text of the alternative declaration, and read more about the summit, at www.foodfirst.org.



Podium at the NGO Forum, World Food Summit, Rome.

NOURISHING PEOPLE OR DISPLACING THEM?

A LETTER TO CARGILL

Our sincere thanks to Elizabeth Parker for allowing us to reprint the following letter.

March 21, 2002

Dear Warren Staley, CEO of Cargill, Inc.,

My mother recently showed me the Feb. 25, '02 letter to retirees on the subject of Cargill's New Vision. My father, Al Greenman, worked for Cargill for most of his working life, in Holland, Denmark and the U.K. before World War II, and in Argentina, Belgium and Canada thereafter. We were a Cargill family, overseas, and I benefited personally.

I must however point out that your first goal, "to be the global leader in nourishing people" is not working. It's not nourishing to export vast quantities of cheap (subsidized?) grain to other countries, when it is convenient, that undercut the price of locally grown grain (a process known as dumping) and drive small farmers out of business and off their land. These exports create more landless people who are driven to the bulging cities and even to the US.

They can no longer produce their own food and can not necessarily afford to buy it either. Better that the small farmers should be encouraged to stay on good land, providing for themselves and sending their surplus to the cities. The worst of the grain export business, combined with the promotion of cash export crops, is that rural communities and whole countries stop storing surplus against drought and then are threatened with famine when bad years come, and those who need food most are least able to buy it. So "dumping" actually contributes to poor nutrition by undermining local food self reliance.

Pushing genetically engineered seed, that cannot legally be saved from year to year, is not a blessing to cash shy peasant farmers, nor

are the varieties, hybrid or GMO, that require more expensive fertilizer, water and even mechanization and fuel.

Keeping the price of grain low by producing huge crops in the US has a harmful effect on the environment too, with farmers everywhere competing for the lowest production costs and using land, fuel and water that would better be conserved for [the] future, especially our eroding soil.



FAO photo: G. Bizzari

A Burmese farmer with her wheat harvest. Will she get a fair price for it?

I don't see that Cargill can truly "respect and value" the "diverse attitudes, beliefs, experience and cultures" of the world if you are part of the destruction of local small scale diversified agricultural cultures worldwide. Biodiversity is lost, culture is lost, community is lost; agricultural knowledge that is more water and fossil fuel efficient is lost. Cargill is not showing respect for other cultures when it pressures our government to work for trade agreements that force other governments

to accept our agricultural surplus and give up their own farmers and food self reliance.

Cargill is so large and powerful, you deal on such a large scale, that you cannot see the "details" that are being destroyed. I don't see how you can even stop what you, we, are doing. It's like asking a cat to stop hunting song birds. Earning small profit margins on big trades is what Cargill does, so everything has to be huge, and cheap, and traded.

But it's not nourishing people. It's displacing them.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth C. Parker (Greenman)

PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA AUGUST 26 TO SEPTEMBER 4, 2002

In June, the Swedish Ministry of the Environment organized a conference, "Stockholm Thirty Years On: Progress Achieved and Challenges Ahead in International Environmental Cooperation," in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) this summer in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Speaking at the conference, Food First Co-Director Anuradha Mittal emphasized that ten years ago, the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development in Rio recognized the connection between the three E's: ecology, economy, and equity. However, ever-increasing greenwashing (the linking of corporate economics to environment) has since resulted in a corporate take over of sustainable

development and the denial of social, economic, and environmental equity and justice around the world.

She talked about Food First's collaboration with the vibrant and diverse movement that will be present in Johannesburg. For example, the Landless Peoples' Movement (LPM) of South Africa has mobilized thousands of rural and urban landless to denounce the hollow notion of sustainable development without land. The larger movement that the LPM is part of will make it obvious to the world that the world's poor and landless will not benefit unless governments are willing to stop protecting the property rights of the world's wealthy minority.

NEW BOOK



Naomi Klein calls it “a scathing obituary for the dominant development model of our time.” Martin Khor says it’s “a must-read for all those concerned with...the future of our planet.” Matt Phillips of Friends of the Earth lauds it as “a powerful study [that] wakes us up to a hostile takeover of Earth Ltd.”

What is it? It’s our incredibly timely new book, *earthsummit.biz: The Corporate Takeover of Sustainable Development* by Kenny Bruno and Joshua Karliner

of CorpWatch, and it’s hot off the press in time to help us all make sense of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg.

Bruno and Karliner analyze the myriad and sophisticated ways transnational corporations have worked to coopt environmental and human rights language and policy in the decade between the 1992

Rio Earth Summit and the 2002 Johannesburg summit. Along with the increasingly familiar “greenwashing” m.o. (whereby a corporation polishes its image with slick, fake-green PR campaigns) *earthsummit.biz* exposes the new corporate process of “bluewashing,” whereby dastardly transnationals ally themselves with the U.N. in order to pose as good world “citizens.” Notably, corporations join the U.N.’s Global Compact—an unenforceable and vague agreement that gives the companies good PR without making them any more answerable to civil society. Transnationals and their lobbyists also have also wedged their way into the WSSD negotiations, vitiating the process. The authors decry this weakening of the U.N.’s power and credibility and call on the U.N. to reclaim its own Earth Summit process and to take its rightful place as the voice of the world’s peoples—not of its corporations. *earthsummit.biz* names names, it rakes muck, and it’s a ripping good read. Check out an excerpt (and order your copy) at www.foodfirst.org.

NEW STAFF AT FOOD FIRST

Food First is delighted to welcome Raj Patel, our new Policy Analyst. He comes to us from the Department of Rural Sociology at Cornell University, where he completed his Ph.D. on Zimbabwean anti-capitalist and pro-feminist activism. During his time at Cornell, he worked on projects involving the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, as well as with social movements in southern

Africa, Asia, and Latin America. He has worked for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, has degrees from Oxford and the London School of Economics, and was a visiting scholar at Yale University. He has written widely on trade, gender, and globalization issues.

PREPARATION FOR THE WSSD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Sustainable development and environmental protection are not possible in a world where a privileged few control access to and ownership of resources. Justice and equity are nonnegotiable in a sustainable world. This understanding will have to form the basis of

any alternative action, and Food First will be taking this message to the WSSD summit. Check our website, www.foodfirst.org, for postings from Johannesburg.

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