

FINAL DECLARATION

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR: AGROFUELS AS AN OBSTACLE TO FOOD AND ENERGY SOVEREIGNTY

São Paulo, 17-19 November 2008

The undersigned organisations and social movements from Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Ecuador, Paraguay, Thailand, the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and the United States, who have come together in São Paulo from 17 to 19 November 2008;

We fundamentally disagree with the strategy to promote agrofuels: in our opinion, agrofuels are not driving development, nor are they sustainable. This strategy represents an obstacle to the necessary structural changes in our system of production and consumption, in agriculture and in the energy matrix, changes that pose real solutions to the challenges of climate change.

We affirm that:

The agroindustrial model, in which agrofuels are included, is intrinsically unsustainable as it leads to the expansion of monocultures, concentration of land, intensive use of agrochemicals, the overexploitation of natural resources that are common heritage, such as biodiversity, water and soil. The production of agrofuels represents a serious threat to food production. Crops grown for energy, regardless of whether they are food crops or not, compete for agricultural land and for water.

The production of agrofuels at industrial scale drives the agricultural frontier, and the expansion of agribusiness – the accumulated effects of this model are the main driver of the destruction of ecosystems world wide; in Brazil they are responsible for the destruction of the Amazone, the Cerrado and other ecosystems.

In Brazil, the sugar cane ethanol sector sustains itself only because of state subsidies: the government programs meant to promote agrofuels have historically been characterised by direct government incentives and subsidies (such as public financing by BNDES, to a large extent using Workers' Aid Funds, FAT) and indirectly (such as no punishment for tax evasion, and debt cancellations).

The sugar cane ethanol sector enjoys the government's support regarding the disrespect for labour and environmental laws: The impacts of ethanol production in Brazil include: over-exploitation and degrading working conditions and the use of slave labour; contamination of soils, air and water and reduced biodiversity. Also, increased land prices and land concentration, that further prohibit land reform programmes and promote the brutal invasion of territories of traditional populations and indigenous communities, and of expropriation of lands of small and medium size producers, thereby threatening the production of food that can be consumed in the country. More land ends up in foreign hands, either through selling or contracting, for the production of agrofuels. This is a recent and very worrying phenomenon, taking for granted the availability of agricultural land and the structural conditions for food production.

We denounce the strategy to export the agro-energy model of the Brazilian government internationally, through action by its Ministries, especially the Ministry of Foreign Relations, and its financial and research institutions, like BNDES and EMBRAPA, **that will reproduce the impacts and problems of this sector in countries of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.**

We question the strategy to expand agrofuel production through the international market: We radically oppose the technology agreement between Brazil and the United States, that aims to harmonise standards to promote ethanol as a global commodity. Nos opomos radicalmente ao acordo de difusão tecnológica Brasil/EUA, que visa a padronização e comoditização do etanol. We oppose the agrofuel blending targets proposed by the European Union and the United States that will boost the demand for land to produce agrofuels in Southern countries.

We alert that nor land planning, nor environmental and social criteria will make the industrial agro-export model sustainable: The proposals for social and environmental certification of agrofuels, looking at different experiences (like FSC, RSPO, RTSB), do not reduce but rather hide the impacts, serving largely as an instrument to legitimise the international trade in agrofuels. The agro-ecological zoning for sugar cane as proposed by the Brazilian government, as well as the spreading of the concept of ‘non-utilised’, ‘degraded’ or ‘marginal’ lands, legitimises the expropriation of territories for the expansion of monocultures, making social conflicts invisible.

We reaffirm our battle of more than one decade against Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO’s): the advance of agrofuels, of ‘second generation’ ethanol and the production of ‘bioplastics’ implicate a structural component of modern biotechnology and synthetic biology, factors that present yet another threat to biodiversity.

The current systems of production and consumption, as promoted by countries of the North, is unsustainable and puts life on this planet at risk: Facing the structural crisis of the capitalist system, linking the issues of energy, environment, food, financing and values, means we have to rethink our model for society and civilisation.

We defend energy sovereignty as an alternative proposal, that does not jeopardise food sovereignty.

Energy and food sovereignty is the right of the people to plan, produce and control energy and food in their territories to meet their needs. We need a new way to organise our ways of life in society, and the relations between country side and cities.

This requires a food production system based on land reform and adapted to the ecological conditions of each particular biome, as a real alternative to the problem of over-exploitation of rural workers and the concentration and access to land; the strengthening of small farmers and local economies; appreciating traditions and the cultural aspects of food; decreasing the distance between production and consumption, and solidary trade relations. This system is also less dependent, more efficient and possibly self-sufficient in terms of energy. It is more appropriate and resistant and presents a real solution to climate change, caused by the oil-dependent agroindustrial model, which is again reproduced by the agrofuel strategy that we are opposing.

It requires an energy and transport system based on the rationalisation of the energy economy, through changing our consumption patterns, reducing global trade flows of goods and energy, promoting transport models that prioritise collective, public and good quality transport instead of individual vehicles; substituting fossil fuels for renewable energy sources produced in a decentralised manner in order to meet local demand; and technical assistance, development and research directed to the interests of people.

The price of energy should be based on real production costs and not be subject to financial speculation. Neither should it be under the control of large corporations.

Food and energy sovereignty is based on principles of democracy and decentralisation, with popular participation in planning and decision making and food and energy production, including access and control over public funds. It is also based on solidarity between the peoples, considering varying conditions, needs and solutions appropriate for each country or region.

Energy and food are people's rights, given to us by the earth, the water and the diversity of nature, and cannot be treated as commodities.