



APWLD

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

NGO on the Roster in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Statement for the 17 April - International Day of Peasants' Struggle

Asia Pacific Women Say No to World Bank Land Policy Persist With the Struggle for Food Sovereignty

On 17 April 1996, twenty one landless agricultural workers were brutally murdered by the military policy in the Brazilian state of Para, when staging a struggle for land.

17 April has become a Day of Peasants Struggle and Solidarity for justice, land and dignity. It is the day of struggle against the policies which alienate land and productive resources from women and men peasants, small farmers, fisherfolk, Dalits, indigenous peoples; take away sources of their livelihoods and push them down into deeper poverty.

All of these are results of the neoliberal economic policies imposed on our countries by the World Bank, IMF, and trade rules of the WTO. World Bank along with other international financial institutions has defined the concept and strategies of development dictated by the interest of market economy. These neoliberal policies promote economic concentration, inequality, injustice, instability and competition. In particular, the Bank's Land Policy for Growth and Poverty Reduction represents the same mix of policies that have severely affected peasants in many countries of the South: the privatisation of land and the liberalisation of trade in agriculture produce are pushed further; investment into biotechnology is encouraged as part of the usual strategy of increasing agricultural output through expensive technical solutions. Also, the privatisation of state support services such as distribution of grain, credit facilities or training to peasants resulted that the small farmers can't afford them anymore.

As rural and indigenous women in the Asia Pacific region have borne disproportionately the impacts the neoliberal policies, they join the global call of peasant's movements for food sovereignty.

The call for food sovereignty is a call for the recognition of the rights of peoples, communities and countries to define for themselves ecologically, socially, economically and culturally acceptable food production. It is a call for community control over productive resources as opposed to corporate control.

For women peasants, food sovereignty entails breaking down of patriarchal structures in agriculture and customary practices related to food production and consumption. They further the burdens of women.

We urge our governments to implement genuine agrarian reform which would fully recognise women's role in food and agricultural production. Women farmers should get access to and control over productive resources – land, water, forests, seeds, coastal and marine resources -

along with their communities. Women should also have a meaningful participation in decision making within their communities and families.

Instead what the farmers face is the World Bank imposed "market assisted land reform". This so called "market-assisted land reform" of the World Bank promotes the sale of land by large landowners to landless or near landless families. This policy is being pushed World Bank in some 30 countries around the world ostensibly to alleviate rural poverty. However, experiences from India, Thailand and other countries have shown that small farmers have been heavily indebted, lost their titles to land and have been expelled from the land all over again.

These programs end up generating greater land concentration, and benefit large landowners who are able to sell their worst plots of land at heavily inflated prices, receiving full payment up front. Experiences have shown that market assisted land reform is an invitation to corruption as control over land sale and transfer process is placed squarely in the hands of rural and urban elites.

Then and now, the struggle has been about land redistribution. For women, it should ensure that they have an access to and control over land as appropriate to their unique circumstances. This can be ensured when women own land in their own names or in names of women's collectives or within their communities, be able to equally participate in the decision making over resources without discrimination. They should receive full respect and recognition of their roles and knowledge of resources management, biodiversity conservation, food security and in the overall well being of families and communities.

Therefore, in solidarity with the women and men peasant's movements, we call for full respect and recognition of the participation of women, particularly of landless peasants and agricultural workers, subsistence farmers and fisherfolk, Dalits and indigenous women, in food production;

We demand that the World Bank imposed destructive land market policy be immediately stopped and genuine agrarian reform be implemented;

We strongly oppose the domination of Monsanto, Nestle and other transnational and big national corporations in food and agriculture sector and call on to promote domestic production and consumption through support of sustainable agriculture systems, free of pesticides and genetically modified plants, animals and seeds;

We demand broad and democratic participation of grassroots peasants' movements in policy formulation and implementation;

We call on to reject dumping practices and the liberalisation of markets imposed through policies of WTO, regional and bilateral "free" trade agreements;

World Bank, WTO, TNCs Out!

WOMEN, UNITE! DEFEND OUR RIGHTS TO FOOD AND LIFE!