

Final Declaration
International Seminar: Agrofuels as an Obstacle to Food and Energy Sovereignty
São Paulo, 17-19 November 2008

Representing 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.

Based on concrete affects of the ethanol production in Brazil, we denounce that:

The production of agrofuels at industrial scale drives the agricultural frontier, and the expansion of agribusiness, which accumulated effects are the main driver of the destruction of ecosystems world wide. In Brazil they are responsible for the destruction of the Amazon, the Cerrado and other biomes.

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 further prohibit land reform programmes and promote the brutal invasion of territories of traditional populations and indigenous communities, and the 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 with infra-structure for food production.

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, will reproduce the impacts and problems of this sector in countries of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

We question the strategy to expand and to export 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. We oppose the compulsory 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 certification based on 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 and the round table of soy – RTRS, pal oil – RSPO or biofuels - RTSB), do not reduce but rather hide the impacts, serving largely as an instrument to legitimise the international trade of agrofuels. The agro-ecological zoning for sugar cane as proposed by the Brazilian government, as well as the spreading of the concepts of ‘non-utilised’, ‘degraded’ or ‘marginal’ lands, legitimise 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 system of production and consumption, as promoted by countries of the North and reproduced by elites in the South, 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 can not be achieved without 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. It implies in a new way to organise our ways of life in society, and the relations between country side and cities.

It 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 resilient 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 by peoples work.
They cannot be treated as commodities.**

Movements, networks and organisations that called the Seminar:

From Brazil

Via Campesina Brasil – MMC, CPT, MPA, MAB,
FEAB, CIMI, PJR, MST
ABRA – Associação Brasileira de Reforma
Agrária
Amigos da Terra Brasil
ANA – Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia
Assembléia Popular
CESE - Coordenadoria Ecumênica de Serviços
CONTAG - Confederação Nacional dos
Trabalhadores na Agricultura
CTB – Central dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras
do Brasil
CUT – Central Única dos Trabalhadores
FASE
FBOMS – Fórum Brasileiro de ONGs e
Movimentos Sociais para o Meio Ambiente e o
Desenvolvimento
FERAESP – Federação dos Empregados Rurais
Assalariados do Estado de São Paulo
FETRAF - Federação dos Trabalhadores na
Agricultura Familiar
Fórum Carajás
Instituto EQUIT
Intersindical
Jubileu Sul Brasil
Marcha Mundial das Mulheres
Plataforma BNDES
RBJA - Rede Brasileira de Justiça Ambiental
REAPI – Rede Ambiental do Piauí
REBRIP – Rede Brasileira pela Integração dos
Povos
Rede Alerta contra o Deserto Verde
Rede Economia e Feminismo
Rede Educação Cidadã
Rede Social de Justiça e Direitos Humanos
Repórter Brasil
SPM - Serviço Pastoral dos Migrantes
Terra de Direitos

International

ActionAid
African Center for Biosafety, South África
Aliança Social Continental
ATALC – Amigos de la Tierra América Latina y
Caribe
CEO – Observatório Europeu de Corporações
CIECA, República Dominicana
Cono Sur Sustentable
FIAN International
FOCO - Foro Ciudadano de Participación por la
Justicia y los Derechos Humanos, Argentina
Food and Water Watch
Heinrich Boell Foundation
Global Forest Coalition
Global Justice Ecology Project, US
Grito dos Excluídos/As Continental
IFG – International Forum on Globalization
Misereor
Oilwatch
OWINFS – Our World is Not for Sale Network
Oxfam
RALLT – Red por una América Latina Libre de
Transgénicos
RMALC - Red Mexicana de Acción Frente al
Libre Comercio
Rede Internacional de Género e Comércio
The Oakland Institute, US
WRM – World Rainforest Movement