

Rice is Life, Culture, and Sovereignty

Monday 15 May 2006, by [FSPI](#), [La Via Campesina](#) (Date first published: 15 May 2006).

The Federation of Indonesian Peasants Union and La Via Campesina are organising an Asian conference on rice and food sovereignty in Jakarta (14-18 May) and are co-hosting the People Assembly, in coordination with other Indonesian social movements, parallel to the FAO regional meeting being held in Jakarta (15-19 May). Please find some additional information about these events below, including the week's schedule of mass protests. Best regards, Isabelle Delforge

Jakarta, May 14, 2006 - The Asia-Pacific People's Conference on Rice and Food Sovereignty organised by the Federation of Indonesian Peasant Union (FSPI) and La Via Campesina (International Peasants' Movement) has opened today in Jakarta at 4pm. The conference (14-18 May) is attended by 10 peasants' organizations[i] coming from 9 countries in Asia-Pacific (members of La Via Campesina) as well as by Indonesian farmers coming from 12 different provinces, representing their peasant union (members of FSPI). There will also be representatives of 3 international NGOs and 3 national NGOs.

The Conference on the theme "Rice is Life, Culture, and Sovereignty" is organized parallel to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) regional conference held in Jakarta (15-19 May). This people conference intends to urge the FAO to adopt the concept of "food sovereignty". The FAO has been promoting "food security" from decades. During the World Food Summit in 1996, governments committed to cut the world's number of hungry people by half by 2015, from 840 million to 420 million people. However, the "food security" concept has not been effective in reducing hunger and poverty. In 2004, FAO noted that the number of hungry people has only decreased by 15 millions of people. It means hunger and poverty are still massively present in many parts of the world, especially in developing and poor countries. Ironically, most poor and hungry people are found in rural areas, among farmers' families, in the communities producing food.

As an international peasant movement, La Via Campesina promotes a concept more adapted to the realities of the peasant's families. Henry Saragih, the general coordinator of La Via Campesina, said at the opening of the conference that : "FAO "food security" concept only relates to food availability, access to food and food safety. It does not takes into considerations where the food comes from and how it is produced. But actually, there are many other aspects to take into account, including production aspects, in order to reduce hunger in the world. This is why we hare promoting food sovereignty that also encompasses issues such as land distribution, farmers control over water, seeds biodiversity and technology. "

In Asia-Pacific, rice is a central product in most people's lives. Furthermore, rice is the staple food of nearly half of the people all over the world. However, rice farmers which mostly came from poor and developing countries are facing a lot of hardship in their daily lives. Hence, it's very important to implement food sovereignty for rice production and trade to make sure that policies do not harm farmers. For example, farmers in Indonesia and in Korea have been recently hit their governments

moves to liberalize their rice domestic markets.

It is important that governments from all over the world do not consider rice only as a market commodity, but that they also recognise it rice is part of the culture, the pride and the way of life maintained in the farming societies for several centuries long.

Along with the conference on rice, FSPI is also hosting and co-organising the People Assembly involving thousands of farmers, students, workers, youth, and other civil society representatives.

The head of FSPI Presidium, Wagimin, said at the press conference today : "This is time for the world to answer peasants' and people's aspirations. Governments have to make sure that peasants are not marginalized by political and business interests." Hunger and poverty can not be solved on only guaranteeing food availability. The governments of the world should provide access to the means of production to the farmers. Wagimin said: "As part of food sovereignty, agrarian reform should be implemented now!"

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[i] Peasants organisations from Asia-Pacific attending the conference: Philippines (Paragos and UNORKA), Thailand (AOP), South Korea (KPL and KWPA), Japan (Nouminren), India (KRRS and BKU), Sri Lanka (MONLAR), Nepal (ANPA), Bangladesh (BKF), USA (NFFC), Indonesia (FSPI), Vietnam (VNFU) and Timor Leste (HASATIL)

PROGRAMME

"Asia-Pacific People Conference on Rice and Food Sovereignty"
Jakarta, May 14-18 2006

OPENING CEREMONY & PRESS CONFERENCE,
Sunday, May 14, 2006 at 4pm

PRESENTATIONS by PEASANTS' ORGANIZATIONS

Monday, May 15, 2006

FSPI (Indonesia): Rice Production and Agrarian Reform

Paragos & KMP (Philippines) : Seeds: farmers vs corporate control

Monlar (Sri Lanka): Sustainable rice production

KKRS (India): Struggle against transnational agribusiness companies (including the GMO issue)

NFFC (United States of America): Producing rice for the world market

KPL (Korea): Peasants' struggle against FTA and how to promote alternative trade

KWPA (Korea): Women struggle in rice production and food sovereignty

AOP (Thailand): Export-oriented rice productions versus farmers

Nouminren (Japan): Rice production and agricultural policies

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

International Committee on Food Sovereignty La Via Campesina (European Farmers Co-ordination):
Food sovereignty: concept, challenges and implementation

PRESENTATIONS by NGOs

Gunawan Wiradi (Indonesian expert on agrarian issues) and GRAIN (International NGO): Follow-up of the international agenda: International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development

(ICARRD) and Convention on Biodiversity (COP-8.) in relation with food sovereignty
IPC (International civil society network working on FAO): Food Sovereignty within the FAO
WALHI (Indonesian environmental NGO): Environmental perspective on rice production (including GMO issue) and food sovereignty
Institute for Global Justice (Indonesian NGO): Food sovereignty, the WTO and FTAs.
KRKP (Indonesian people coalition for food sovereignty): Food sovereignty: challenges and implementation in Indonesian policy.

Wednesday, May 17, 2006
Groups discussions

Thursday, May 18, 2006
Peasant's demonstration in front of Shangril-la Hotel (FAO conference)

MASS DEMONSTRATIONS

Monday, May 15, 2006 at 10 am
Action (about 500 people) in front of Shangrilla Hotel (FAO conference)
Issue: Implement Food Sovereignty!

Tuesday, May 16, 2006 at 10 am
Action (about 500 people) in front of the National Land Office (BPN).
Issue: Refuse the amendment of the Indonesian agrarian law (UUP 1960)!

Wednesday, May 17, 2006 at 10 am
Action (about 20.000 people) in front of President Palace and House of representatives.
Issue: Implement agrarian reform, refuse the revision of UUPA 1960, Stop violence, Stop importing rice!

Friday, May 18, 2006 at 10am
Action (about 5000 people) in front of Shangri-La Hotel (FAO conference).
Issue: Implement food sovereignty!