

The rights of peasants to strengthen the human rights framework

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(Geneva, 8 March 2010) During the current session of the UN Human Rights Council, the Advisory Committee will present a study on discrimination in the context of the right to food. This study concludes that peasant families are among the main victims of right to food violations and discrimination and that there is an urgent need to enhance their protection under international human rights law.

That is the main message conveyed by many internationally-known human rights defenders, activists and farmers in the Conference titled “A New Initiative to Protect the Rights of Peasants”, organized by the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights on Monday (8/3).

The study, an initiative by global voice of the peasants, La Via Campesina, is now awaiting for further recognition. Henry Saragih from La Via Campesina and Serikat Petani Indonesia (SPI) who attends this conference reiterated that “This initiative by peasants worldwide is a huge leap in the struggle against injustice, and we want to congratulate the work of the Advisory Committee. We also hope that the UN Human Rights Council in their current session this March will be deciding in favour of this initiative.”

Olivier de Schutter, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food said that this initiative is really intertwining with the right to food. Rights of peasants, as also included in the annex of the Advisory Committee’s study, presents an approach to rights that does not only consider the civil-political side, but also in the social, economic, and cultural rights. Furthermore de Schutter highlighted three major problems to which a peasant’s rights approach could bring a solution. The first is the increasing speculation on land, the second is the problem of seeds and genetic resources, and the third is the problem of agribusiness mode of production in producing food.

Jean Ziegler, from the Advisory Committee said that we still need governments to support this initiative. “So far, we thank the Cuba’s mission for taking the initiative to support a resolution in the current session of the UN Human Rights Council,” he said. Nevertheless, the discussion on the rights of peasants is still wide open—as the peasants movement, the Advisory Committee, and human rights activists are trying to give a shape this this new piece in the global human rights framework.

“Let’s support the initiative together to make the world a better place, to provide a real solution to the food crisis, to create jobs in agriculture and therefore to develop rural areas, to defend people’s food sovereignty and at the same time to reduce poverty. This can be done if we protect and fulfil the rights of peasants worldwide,” conclude Henry.

Some of the ambassadors, staffs and diplomats for the UN were also discussing the initiative in the occasion.