

The current food crisis, which has been making headlines for months, is difficult to ignore, particularly with respect to food sovereignty and to the right to sustainable agriculture. The situation of farmers whose rights are being trampled, combined with the persistent problem of world hunger, paints a rather bleak and insufficiently explained picture of the current global climate.

Despite all the talk of food sovereignty and the increasingly pressing need to ensure its viability and especially its vitality, the global food crisis must be taken as a call to action.

The Equitable Agriculture Movement (MAÉ-MAÉ) has been following recent developments related to the significance and implications of the food crisis...

Happy reading!

What they're saying...

"What is important today is to realize that the time for talking is long past. Now is the time for action."

Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), June 3, 2008

"Biofuels are not bandits. "

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Brazilian President, at the FAO summit, June 2008

FAO High-Level Conference in Rome, June 3 to 5 2008

"It was a total failure, extremely disappointing, and very worrisome for the future of the United Nations. The summit is fairly unique in the history of the organization: over 50 heads of state and government leaders came together to discuss concrete solutions to the appalling, daily massacre that is world hunger, which is getting worse still with the jump in feedstock prices in the past five or six months. But the results of this conference are absolutely scandalous, privileging private interests instead of collective interests. The decisions that were made in Rome might well worsen world hunger instead of combating it," asserted Jean Ziegler, former United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and currently a member of the Advisory Committee of the United Nations Human Rights Council, following the FAO summit on the global food crisis, held in Rome this June.

The FAO High-Level summit closed on a very ambivalent note. The conference's general goal was to get a better grasp of food-security issues in the wake of soaring food prices, and to identify new challenges related to climate change and energy security. Member countries of the international community intended to develop new, sustainable

solutions to the food crisis while identifying the necessary policies, strategies and programs to maintain short- and long-term world food security. The conference ended with a signed declaration, ratified Thursday evening following extensive discussion.

"We urge governments to assign appropriate priority to the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors, in order to create conditions to enable the world's smallholder farms and fishers, including indigenous people, in particular in vulnerable areas, to participate in and benefit from financial mechanisms and investment flows to support climate change adaptation, mitigation and technology development, transfer and dissemination. We support the establishment of agriculture systems and the sustainable forest management practices that positively contribute to the mitigation of climate change and ecological balance," the declaration reads. Although the declaration generally urges the international community to increase its aid to developing countries, the means of implementation are nonetheless more challenging to identify concretely.

It remains that this well-intentioned summit has not significantly impacted the course of the unfolding food crisis. The examination of several issues has even been postponed to

the G8 Summit, to be held in Japan this July. Things may be progressing, but only at a snail's pace, and not necessarily in the right direction...

Chronology of Recent Events at the World Trade Organization (WTO)

May 19, 2008 : WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy announces the circulation of two papers revised in anticipation of a final agreement on agricultural trade. The two-revised documents include what could become the formulas for cutting tariffs and trade-distorting agricultural subsidies in a final deal. These drafts are revisions of papers first circulated in July 2007, then in February 2008. According to Director-General Lamy and to Crawford Falconer, Chairperson of Agriculture Negotiations, the revisions represent a step in the right direction, towards a final accord to conclude the Doha Round begun in 2000.

May 26, 2008: Agriculture talks resumed Monday, May 26, 2008 with a new round of discussions on the last revised draft modalities, distributed a week earlier. A small group of 37 delegates representing all coalitions and principal stakeholders were mandated to negotiate during the week, while members tried to align their respective points of view.

June 3, 2008: Negotiators in the agriculture talks have clarified certain points and shown themselves willing to collaborate in order to sort out their differences. According to Crawford Falconer, the progress has been "incremental." Chairperson Crawford called for another meeting during the week of June 9, to allow delegates time to consult each other and to bring results to the negotiating table. The goal now is to resolve technical differences and to simplify political options while members prepare for the forthcoming negotiations combining agriculture with access to non-agricultural markets and other topics.

And finally...Among the leadership of the WTO, there is talk of a final deal, of a round coming to an end, and which will conclude as swiftly as possible.

How the coming weeks will unfold remains to be seen. The negotiations, as crucial as they are, have stagnated, with no agreement in sight. Agriculture is about much more than commercial merchandise, and differences thus bear much more weight around the negotiation table.

The negotiations currently threaten the supply management model for equitable agriculture, a model that has proved functional and as advantageous for producers as for the processing industry and for the state. For a long time, representatives of Canadian sectors under supply management have been working to ensure a presence at the Geneva headquarters of the WTO to express their stubborn refusal of imposed trade rules that hinder the equality of an established and successful system.

Could the Doha Round truly be drawing to a close? If so, will the resulting agreement be satisfactory to all parties? We highly doubt it. Faced with the food crisis, some clamour that we must end the Doha Round in order to further expand free trade! However, one of the major causes of the food crisis is the increasing fragility of agriculture since the implementation of the WTO's Agriculture Agreement in 1995.

Please visit the Equitable Agriculture Movement online at:

www.mae-mae.org