

**NGO Statement at the Thematic Discussion on LAND  
7 May 2008, 3:00-6:00pm Delivered by Third World Network**

Response to Belarus' challenge: (NGOs in policy process)

NGOs, when given the space and opportunity, do participate actively in national processes on the formulation and implementation of land and agrarian reform programs. In the case of the Philippines, since the 1970s, NGOs have been actively involved in organizing, training and education, implementing livelihood projects, and providing support services to farmers and agrarian reform communities - despite the many constraints and obstacles, including risks to our lives in the face of political and military repression.

Land lies at the heart of the current thematic cluster. To farmers and indigenous peoples the world over, LAND IS LIFE.

Without access to productive land and resources, farmers leave for the urban slums, or stay poor for the rest of their lives. In the most dramatic cases, we see farmers killing and willing to be killed over their land, or worse, commit suicide. The more than 3 billion rural people increasingly face the threat of displacement from their lands and alienation from their livelihood sources to give way to mega-development projects, such as large dams, and agrofuel plantations. Conflicts over land and natural resources are likely to increase with climate change.

Distinguished delegates, you all know all this ugly reality. The question that you face in this review session is: what have you done to address this to achieve sustainable development?

A combination of national and international policies is responsible for driving peasant and indigenous communities to economic destitution. These include deregulation and privatization of land ownership, which have led to the reconcentration of land ownership in many countries; the dismantling of rural public services; the privatization of support services for production and marketing by small and medium-scale producers; the promotion of capital-intensive and industrial agro-exportation; and the liberalization of agricultural trade and policies on international trade.

NGOs have been calling for genuine agrarian reform based on the human rights framework that recognizes the socio-environmental functions of productive resources in the context of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is based on the human right to food and to self-determination, and integrates policies of redistribution, equitable access to and control over productive resources by local communities.

A genuine agrarian reform does not only involve land re-distribution, but also recognizes gender equity, the "cosmovision" of the territories of communities evolved through millennia of interaction with the land and its bounty, and farmers' capacity as stewards

and managers of productive resources. The State must play a strong role in agrarian reform, ensuring tenurial security and food production to guarantee the rights of rural communities. Without the mobilization and full participation of farmers and social movements, there will be no genuine agrarian reform.

NGOs hurl this challenge to CSD delegates: Give land to the tillers and recognize tenurial rights. Deliver basic support services, infrastructures and investments, in order to bring food to the table of the poor and bring back the dignity of farmers. NGOs are willing to help you, but you must first do your job.

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