

NGO STATEMENT  
May 9, 2008

Madame Chairlady

We welcome the points made by the Norwegian ambassador and key issues raised by some country delegations and major groups this morning.

1. It is indeed impossible to underestimate how closely interlinked the themes of the current cycle of the CSD16 are. The current challenge of climate change emphasizes the need to focus on the poor because they are the most vulnerable and most affected by its impacts. However our thinking and actions still ignore the differentiated concerns of small farmers, livestock keepers, pastoralists, herders, artisanal fisherfolk and indigenous peoples whose lives and livelihoods are affected.

There are some key challenges relevant to this discussion that we would like to emphasise:

The recognition of rights of the poor to productive resources

2. Land issues including its access, tenure, control and redistribution have clear connections with social inequality. Land cannot only be seen from the perspective of its market value, degree of productivity or short-term profit generation potential.

3. There is a deficit of control of and access to land and water by the poor, highlighting key power and gender imbalances. Land reform, restitution and redistribution processes although complex, opposed by the powerful need to take place and be supported politically.

4. Conflicts over land and natural resources are and will continue to increase. Pressure over scarce natural resources will become more intense. If rights to land and water resources for the poor go unrecognized stability and safety essential for sustainable development will be impacted.

The implementation of food sovereignty

5. In a time of hunger for millions, some discussions have only emphasized the potential of commodity food production for export and little has been said about the internationally agreed human right of people to food. We believe that the CSD must work towards making the right of peoples to define their own food and agricultural systems and to access healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound, socially responsible and sustainable methods a reality for all. The principles of food sovereignty can become a reality. A new approach to trade

6. Trade is important but overemphasizing its potentialities without internalizing the lessons learned about the negative impacts on the lives of rural and urban poor and without challenging the reduction of policy space imposed by the current international trade regime in a context where flexibility is fundamental to address climate change is at least irresponsible and could only exacerbate existing inequalities.

The technology paradigm - GMOs and agrofuels

7. The recent IAASTD report emphasizes the role of agro-ecological farming methods and humane and sustainable practices that protect biodiversity and make agriculture more resilient and adaptive as it is needed in times of climate change. The until now marginalized pool of knowledge and expertise found across the world among farming, fishing, livestock keeping, pastoralists and indigenous communities can contribute to attain more equitable and sustainable farming and food systems in the future. The time has come for alternative R&D that moves away from pure technological fixes such as GMOs that avoid considering key issues of power, control and unfair risk allocation. Technology must be a matter of social accountability and not only a good business opportunity.

8. Apart from the important role of formal education mentioned, the delivery of knowledge and skills to serve the practical needs of the poor require further attention. Impact studies of the privatization of agricultural extension services, particularly veterinary services, indicate the failure to reach poor and remote farmers. Proven community-based extension that revalorizes and supports traditional knowledge systems and networks, is an alternative solution for the most vulnerable and needs to be supported.

9. The current food crisis, the newly created pressures on peoples and natural resources due to agrofuels, reflect short term thinking and the failure to make decisions democratically and in a way that takes into account economic, environmental, ethical and social aspects.

10. In this complexity there is need for increased input by and empowerment of the poor and marginalized in decision-making processes and greater control by them over land, water and genetic resources; democratic processes that are participatory, gender responsive and inclusive should determine demand driven policies that protect food security and the right to food, biodiversity, environmental quality and livelihoods and that meet the needs of the poor.

11. The CSD can take leadership to transform and challenge the business as usual approach and address the structural root causes that limit the achievement of sustainable development.

Thank you