

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Presented at the Conference on Racism and Globalization

Winston G. Carroo

FIRST LET ME BEGIN BY STATING THAT I DO NOT THINK THAT RACISM IS AN INTENTIONAL ASPECT OF GLOBALIZATION. GLOBALIZATION IS ALL ABOUT MONEY AND THE ONLY COLOR THAT MATTERS IN THIS PROCESS IS THE COLOR ON MONEY. WHETHER OR NOT RACISM IS INTENTIONAL OR NOT IS IRRELEVANT HERE. THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS THAT THOSE WHO SUFFER THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF GLOBALIZATION ARE PEOPLE OF COLOR. IF AN ELEPHANT IS SITTING ON TOP YOU, IT DOES NOT MATTER IF IT IS AN ASIAN ELEPHANT OR AFRICAN ELEPHANT, WILD ELEPHANT OR ZOO ELEPHANT. YOU JUST WANT TO GET OUT FROM UNDER THAT WEIGHT.

ANOTHER THING I WOULD LIKE TO MENTION BEFORE I BEGIN IS THAT WE SHOULD NOTE THAT ALL THESE PROCESSES OF GLOBALIZATION WE ARE DISCUSSING HERE –WHETHER AGRICULTURE AND FOOD, EDUCATION, CULTURE, WATER ETC- ARE ALL INTER-RELATED AND SHOULD NOT BE VIEWED SEPARATELY. THE SAME FORCES THAT AFFECT ONE AFFECT THE OTHER. LIKewise THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM ONE ASPECT USUALLY SUFFER FROM OTHERS AS WELL.

THE CURRENT GLOBAL FOOD PRICE CRISIS PROVIDES THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY FOR A DISCUSSION OF THIS TOPIC. ALTHOUGH MUCH HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT THE CRISIS IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS, VERY LITTLE OR NOTHING HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT THE RACIAL DIMENSIONS OF THIS CRISIS. THERE HAVE BEEN QUITE A BIT SAID ABOUT THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION AND OTHER FACTORS, PARTICULARLY, FREE TRADE, ON THE SITUATION, BUT NOTHING OF THE RACIAL DIMENSIONS. AND YET, OF THE 37 OR SO COUNTRIES IDENTIFIED BY THE UNITED NATIONS' FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION THAT ARE IN CRITICAL NEED OF FOOD ASSISTANCE, 22 ARE IN AFRICA AND I AM QUITE SURE YOU CAN GUESS WHERE THE OTHERS ARE. ALL OF THESE COUNTRIES ARE WHAT WE CALL SOUTHERN COUNTRIES, DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES OR IMPOVERISHED COUNTRIES– BUT ALL POPULATED BY PEOPLE OF COLOR. (HERE I PREFER TO USE THE TERM IMPOVERISHED INSTEAD OF POOR AND THERE IS A SUBSTANTIVE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO.) IS IT MERE COINCIDENCE THAT WHEN WE TALK OF THE FOOD CRISIS, HEALTH CRISIS, ECONOMIC CRISIS OR ANY OTHER CRISIS FOR THAT MATTER, IT IS THE COUNTRIES AND COMMUNITIES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR THAT IS THE SUBJECT DISCUSSION?

VERY FEW PEOPLE WILL ADMIT THAT RACISM IS AT THE HEART OF THE INEQUITIES THAT EXIST IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC SYSTEM AND THE

ROOT CAUSE OF THIS CURRENT FOOD CRISIS AND THE OTHER CRISES AS WELL. MANY WILL BLAME THE LACK OF TECHNOLOGY AND INVESTMENT, THE LACK OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS, LACK OF MOTIVATION AND THE LACK OF THIS AND THE LACK OF THAT. BUT IF WE BECOME AS LITTLE CHILDREN AND ASK WHY? WHY? WHY? AND WHY, PERHAPS WE WILL GET CLOSER TO THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER. IF WE ASK WHY IS THERE A LACK OF TECHNOLOGY AND INVESTMENT (BECAUSE THE RISKS ARE LARGE) WHY? (BECAUSE THE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL SYSTEMS ARE NOT WELL DEVELOPED) WHY? (BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENTS DO NOT HAVE ADEQUATE FINANCIAL AND THE HUMAN RESOURCES FOR THESE THINGS) WHY? (THE COUNTRY IS POOR) WHY? AND SO ON. VERY SOON WE WILL COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT RACE IS A CRITICAL FEATURE IN THE UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH THAT GLOBALIZATION IS SUPPOSED REMEDY, OR SO WE ARE LED TO BELIEVE. AND IF WE ARE STILL NOT CONVINCED, ONE LOOK AT A MAP INDICATING THE “POOR COUNTRIES”, THERE IS NO ESCAPING THE CONCLUSION THAT THIS IS WHERE THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLES OF COLOR LIVE. BUT TO ADMIT THAT RACE IS THE MAIN REASON FOR THE INEQUITIES THAT EXIST TO ADMIT THAT THE CENTRAL TENET OF OUR DEMOCRATIC AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS THAT “ALL MEN AND WOMEN ARE CREATED EQUAL,” IS ESSENTIALLY A LIE.

WITH RESPECT TO AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, TO UNDERSTAND THESE CONCEPTS IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF EUROPEAN EXPLORATION, CONQUEST, COLONIZATION, DOMINATION AND EXPLOITATION OF PEOPLE OF COLOR OVER THE CENTURIES SINCE COLUMBUS GOT LOST. WITH THE SINGULAR GOAL OF ENRICHING THE EUROPEAN MOTHERLANDS THROUGH THE EXTRACTION OF WEALTH IN THE FORM OF NATURAL RESOURCES, COLONIZERS USED IMPORTED SLAVE LABOR AND CONQUERED INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO PRODUCE AGRICULTURAL AND MINERAL PRODUCTS FOR EXPORTS TO THEIR RESPECTIVE MOTHERLANDS. IT IS MY FIRM BELIEF THAT THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND EVEN THE RENAISSANCE IN EUROPE COULD NOT HAVE OCCURRED WITHOUT THE WEALTH PRODUCED BY PEOPLE OF COLOR. THIS DOMINANT FORM OF WEALTH TRANSFERENCE (ACTUAL GOODS) CONTINUED WELL INTO THE ERA OF INDEPENDENCE BUT WAS SOON TRANSFORMED AND ADDED TO, WEALTH TRANSFERENCE IN THE FORM OF INTEREST PAYMENTS ON LOANS FROM MULTILATERAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND PRIVATE INVESTMENT. THIS IS NOW GIVING WAY TO WEALTH TRANSFER IN THE FORM OF “FREE TRADE” WHICH IS REALLY AS MISNOMER. BELIEVE ME THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS FREE TRADE, REGARDLESS OF WHAT WE HEAR. YES THERE IS A LOT OF TRADING GOING ON BETWEEN NATIONS, BUT TO DESCRIBE IT AS FREE TRADE IS TO DENY REALITY. WITH MANY DEVELOPING NATIONS UNABLE TO PAY THEIR DEBTS, THE MASTERS OF THE WEALTH TRANSFER GAME DEvised YET ANOTHER WAY CONTINUE THE WEALTH TRANSFER MECHANISMS. **FREE**

TRADE. THEY DECIDED TO RELIEVE SOME OF THE DEBTS OF SOME NATIONS THAT AGREE TO CONDITIONALITIES SUCH AS OPENING THEIR MARKETS TO GOODS, SERVICES AND INVESTMENT. THESE HIPC COUNTRIES MUST PRODUCE PRSP (SOUNDS LIKE HICCUPS AND PERSPIRATION) IN ORDER TO QUALIFY. THIS MEANS REMOVAL OF TARIFFS AND NON-TARIFF BARRIERS ON THE MOVEMENT OF GOODS AND CAPITAL INTO THE COUNTRY. ENTER THE CHEAP SUBSIDIZED FOOD IMPORTS THAT UNDERMINE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY. IN SHORT, THEN, GLOBALIZATION AND FREE TRADE IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT, MUST BE SEEN AS ANOTHER STEP IN THE “LADDER OF EVOLUTION” IN THE CONTINUING PROCESS OF WEALTH TRANSFER FROM POOR TO RICH. I DO NOT WHAT THE NEXT STEP THIS PROCESS IS GOING TO BE, BUT I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT THERE WILL BE A NEXT STEP.

SO WHAT DOES ALL THIS HAVE TO DO WITH AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY? EVERYTHING!!! ALTHOUGH THE TERM IS RELATIVELY NEW, FOOD SOVEREIGNTY EXISTED IN THE PRE-COLONIAL ERA BUT DURING THE COLONIAL ERA NATURAL RESOURCES SUCH AS LAND AND WATER AS WELL AS HUMAN RESOURCES WERE DEDICATED TO THE PRODUCTION OF EXPORT ITEMS, WHETHER AGRICULTURAL OR MINERAL, AT THE EXPENSE OF LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION. THIS FOOD DEFICIT WAS FILLED THROUGH IMPORTATION OF FOODS THAT EVEN TODAY INFLUENCE OUR DIETARY HABITS. THIS TREND CONTINUES TODAY WITH THE NEED TO EARN “HARD CURRENCY”, TO PAY FOR IMPORTS AND SERVICE THE DEBTS, FROM EXPORTS. THIS PATTERN OF EXPORT ORIENTED AGRICULTURE ESSENTIALLY DESTROYED THE FOOD SOVEREIGNTY OF COMMUNITIES AND COUNTRIES OF COLOR. AS OUR COUNTRIES BECAME MORE SUBSERVIENT TO THE FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS THAT DICTATE NOT ONLY THERE TRADE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES, IT IS NOT ONLY FOOD SOVEREIGNTY THAT IS LOST BUT ALSO POLITICAL AND NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND WITH THEM THE IDEA OF SELF DETERMINATION.

LET ME BACK UP FOR A MINUTE AND DEFINE FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THIS TERM AND FOOD SECURITY. FOOD SECURITY IS NOT FOOD SOVEREIGNTY. A COUNTRY CAN ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY THROUGH FOOD IMPORTS AS ENVISIONED BY THE FREE TRADE MODEL. BUT AS WE SEE IN THE CURRENT FOOD PRICE CRISIS, THERE ARE MANY FACTORS THAT CAN ACT TO INFLUENCE AND IMPEDE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF FOOD SECURITY THROUGH IMPORTS. PRICE AND AVAILABILITY ON THE GLOBAL MARKET BEING CHIEF AMONG THEM. FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ON THE OTHER HAND, IS THE DOMESTIC PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD BASED ON LOCAL CONDITIONS AND NEEDS AND FROM EXTERNAL MANIPULATIONS AND PRESSURES. THE TERM AND CONCEPT WERE COINED BY VIA CAMPESINA AND WAS INTRODUCED AT THE WORLD FOOD SUMMIT IN 1996. THIS IDEA IS NOT

AGAINST THE IMPORTATION OF FOOD, BUT THIS IS NOT CENTRAL TO FOOD SECURITY. RATHER, IT DEFINES FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AS “THE RIGHT OF ALL PEOPLES TO DEFINE THEIR AGRICULTURAL POLICIES TO ENSURE DOMESTIC FOOD PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION.” THE PRINCIPLE OF FOOD SEVERITY REQUIRES:

- PLACING FOOD PRODUCTION FOR DOMESTIC MARKETS OVER PRODUCTION FOR EXPORTS
- ENSURING FAIR PRICES TO FARMERS, INCLUDING THE ABILITY AND POWER OF GOVERNMENTS TO RESTRICT DUMPING OF SUBSIDIZED FOOD IMPORTS.
- ACCESS TO LAND, WATER, FISHING AND OTHER RESOURCES
- COMMUNITY CONTROL OVER PRODUCTIVE RESOURCES AS OPPOSED TO CORPORATE CONTROL AND OWNERSHIP
- PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN AND SUPPORT FOR PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

UNDER THE CURRENT GLOBAL SYSTEM INTO WHICH PEOPLE OF COLOR HAVE BECOME ENTANGLED, MOST, IF NOT ALL THEIR COUNTRIES HAVE SACRIFICED THEIR SOVEREIGNTY, INCLUDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, ON THE ALTAR OF GLOBALIZATION AND FREE TRADE.

LURED BY THE IMPORTATION OF CHEAP, SUBSIDIZED FOODS FROM INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES, MANY OF OUR GOVERNMENTS DID NOT ENCOURAGE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION THROUGH POLICY OR FINANCIAL SUPPORT. WE HEARD YESTERDAY HOW, IN MEXICO THERE ARE SOME IN GOVERNMENT WHO BELIEVE THERE ARE TOO MANY FARMERS. THE RESULT OF A LACK OF SUPPORT FOR FARMERS ARE PREDICTABLE. HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT IN RURAL AREAS, MIGRATION, PARTICULARLY OF YOUTH TO THE CITIES AND ACROSS BORDERS AND DEPENDENCE ON SOMEONE ELSE TO FEED YOUR POPULATION. THIS IS A RECIPE FOR INSTABILITY, IF EVER THERE WAS ONE AND THE RIOTS SPARKED BY THE CURRENT FOOD CRISIS IS A REMINDER THAT THOSE WHO CONTROL YOUR FOOD ALSO CONTROL YOUR DESTINY. HUNGRY PEOPLE ARE ANGRY PEOPLE AND THE FEAR OF GLOBAL INSTABILITY WAS ONE OF THE MAJOR FACTORS LEADING TO THE RECENT UN SUMMIT IN ROME TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE - NOT THE HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES BUT THE SPECTER RIOTING PEOPLE IN THE STREETS THAT THREATEN THE STABILITY THAT GLOBAL CAPITAL AND CORPORATE INTERESTS REQUIRE.

WHILE WE ARE CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES AND TRANS-NATIONAL CORPORATIONS, WE MUST ALSO BLAME OUR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP WHO ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN. AFTER ALL THE CORPORATIONS AND FOOD EXPORTING COUNTRIES ARE LOOKING OUR FOR THEIR INTERESTS AND THOSE OF THEIR POPULATIONS. I WISH OUR COUNTRIES WOULD DO THE SAME. WE HEARD YESTERDAY HOW THE DEBT IS BEING USED AS A WEAPON OF MASS SUBMISSION. BUT WE ALSO KNOW THAT OUR GOVERNMENTS DO NOT ENACT DOMESTIC

POLICIES THAT SUPPORT FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, WHICH SURELY IS ALSO A LACK OF VISION.

LET ME CLOSE BY REVISITING THE DECLARATION OF THE RECENT FOOD SUMMIT THAT WAS HELD IN ROME EARLIER THIS MONTH. AGAIN, THE FOOD DUMPING NATIONS GOT THEIR WAY. BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION DENY THAT THERE IS ANY LINK BETWEEN FARM AND OTHER SUBSIDIES AND THE FOOD CRISIS. THIS WAS NOT MENTIONED IN THE DECLARATION. MANY BELIEVE THAT THE DIVERSION OF CORN AND OTHER GRAINS TO ETHANOL FOR FUEL IS ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS FOR THE CRISIS. AT THE INSISTENCE OF THE GAS GUZZLING NATIONS, THE DECLARATION REFERRED THIS ISSUE FOR FURTHER STUDY. AND WHAT IS BEING PROMOTED IN THE DECLARATION? THE SAME FAILED POLICIES AND PROGRAMS THAT MANY BELIEVE LED TO THE CRISIS IN THE FIRST PLACE. THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT THE INCREASED COST OF PETROLEUM IS ONE OF THE MAJOR CAUSES OF THE CRISIS YET ONE OF THE SOLUTIONS OFFERED WAS TO PROMOTE THE INCREASED USE OF FERTILIZERS AND OTHER PETROLEUM BASED INPUTS AND TECHNOLOGIES. THIS IS LIKE TRYING TO PUT OUT A FIRE BY POURING GASOLINE ON IT. THE PROPOSED PROGRAM TO INCREASE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY IN DEVELOPING NATIONS BY 50% BY 2030 WILL COST AN ESTIMATED \$20 TO \$30 BILLION PER YEAR. AND WHERE IS THIS EXPECTED TO COME FROM? THE VERY SAME NATIONS (US AND EUROPEAN) WHOSE FOOD AGRICULTURAL POLICIES ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM AND WHOSE FARMERS STAND TO LOOSE IF THIS PLAN SUCCEEDS. PEOPLE GET REAL!! THIS NOT GOING TO HAPPEN. THESE COUNTRIES HAVE DEMONSTRATED TIME AND AGAIN THAT PROTECTING THEIR INTERESTS IS THEIR PRIMARY REASON FOR THEIR PARTICIPTION IN THESE MULTI -LATERAL EXERCISES. TO EXPECT THEM TO SUPPORT ANY POLICY OR PROGRAM THAT WILL BE DETRIMENTAL TO THEIR FARMERS AND ECONOMIES IS A PIPE DREAM. THIS WILL BECOME YET ANOTHER UN INITIATIVE THAT WOULD REMAIN LARGELY UNFUNDED AND UNIMPLEMENTED. INSTEAD OF THE WISHFUL THINKING THAT THE UN WILL RESCUE US FROM THIS CRISIS, WE NEED TO BE WORKING TO ENSURE THAT OUR OWN GOVERNMENTS ENACT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS THAT WILL INCREASE LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION AND PROMOTE FOOD SOVEREIGNTY.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.