

# Why we left our farms to come to Copenhagen

Thursday 17 December 2009, by [La Via Campesina](#), [SARAGIH Henry](#) (Date first published: 7 December 2009).

## **Speech of Henry Saragih, general coordinator of Via Campesina Opening of Klimaforum - Copenhagen Dec 7**

Tonight is a very special night for us to get together here for the opening of the assembly of the social movements and civil society at the Klimaforum. We, the international peasant movement La Via Campesina, are coming to Copenhagen from all five corners of the world, leaving our farmland, our animals, our forest, and also our families in the hamlets and villages to join you all.

Why is it so important for us to come this far? There are a number of reasons for that. Firstly, we would like to tell you that climate change is already seriously impacting us. It brings floods, droughts and the outbreak of pests that are all causing harvest failures. I must point out that these harvest failures are something that the farmers did not create. Instead, it is the polluters who caused the emissions who destroy the natural cycles. So, we small scale farmers came here to say that we will not pay for their mistakes. And we are asking the emitters to face up to their responsibilities.

Secondly, I would like to share with you some facts about who the emitters of green house gases in agriculture really are: new data that has come out clearly shows that industrial agriculture and the globalized food system are responsible of between 44 and 57% of total global greenhouse gas emissions. This figure can be broken down as follows (i) Agricultural activities are responsible for 11 to 15%, (ii) Land clearing and deforestation cause an additional 15 to 18%, (iii) Food processing, packing and transportation cause 15 to 20%, and (iv) Decomposition of organic waste causes another 3 to 4%. It means that our current food system is a major polluter.

The question we have to answer now is: how do we solve the climate chaos, hunger and assure a better livelihood for farmers, when the agricultural sector itself is contributing more than half of the total emissions? We believe that it is the industrial and agribusiness model of agriculture that is at the root of the problem, because those percentages that I mentioned earlier come from the deforestation and the conversion of natural forests into monoculture plantations, all of which is being carried out by Agribusiness Corporations. Not by family farmers. Such large emissions of methane by agriculture are also due to the use of urea as a petrochemical fertilizer through the green revolution, very much supported by the World Bank. At the same time, agricultural trade liberalization promoted by free trade agreements (FTA) and by the World Trade Organization (WTO) is contributing to the greenhouse gases emissions due to food processing and food transportation around the world.

If we genuinely want to tackle the climate change crisis, the only way we have to go forward is to stop industrial agriculture. Agribusiness has not only highly contributed to the climate crisis, it has also massacred the small farmers of the world. Millions of farmers, men and women from around the world, have been kicked off their land. Millions of others suffer violence every year because of land conflicts in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Small farmers and landless farmers make up the majority of the more than 1 billion hungry people in the world. And because of free trade, many

small farmers commit suicide in South Asia. So putting an end to industrial agriculture is the only way we can go.

Will the current climate negotiations, that are relying on carbon trade mechanisms, bring solutions to climate change? To this we say that carbon trade mechanisms will only serve polluting countries and companies, and bring disaster to small farmers and indigenous peoples in developing countries. The REDD initiative (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) has already kicked off their land many indigenous peoples and small farmers in developing countries. And more and more agricultural land is being converted into tree plantations in order to attract carbon credits.

At COP 13 in Bali 2007, La Via Campesina proposed the landless farmers' and small farmers' solution to climate change, which is: "small scale sustainable farmers are cooling down the earth". And here, at COP 15, again we bring that proposal, backing it with the figures that prove that it could reduce more than half of the global greenhouse gas emissions. This figure comes from: (I) Recuperating organic matter in the soil would reduce emissions by 20 to 35%. (ii) Reversing the concentration of meat production in factory farms and reintegrating joint animal and crop production would reduce them by 5 to 9% (iii) Putting local markets and fresh food back at the center of the food system would reduce a further 10 to 12%. (iv) Halting land clearing and deforestation would stop 15 to 18% of emissions. In short, by taking agriculture away from the big agribusiness corporations and putting it back into the hands of small farmers, we can reduce half of the global emissions of greenhouse gases. This is what we propose, and we call it Food Sovereignty.

And to achieve that we need social movements to work together and struggle together to put an end to the current false solutions that are today on the table at the climate negotiations. This is a must, otherwise we will face an even bigger tragedy worldwide. We, as social movements, have to bring our own agenda onto the table, because we are the first climate victims and climate refugees and therefore climate justice is in our hands.

At the FAO Food Summit in 1996, governments committed themselves to reduce hunger by half by 2015. The reality is that the number of hungry people has recently increased dramatically. We do not want the same thing to happen with the climate talks and see the emissions increase even further regardless of what the governments negotiate within the UNFCCC.

We invite all the movements present in Copenhagen to join together to bring climate justice to the table. Climate justice will only be achieved through solidarity and social justice.

**Copenhagen, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2009**

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## **INVITATION TO AN ACTION AND A STREET PRESS CONFERENCE**

**13 December : La Via Campesina against the Agro-Export Industry  
At 12 pm, Axelborg/Vesterbrogade, Copenhagen**

(Copenhagen, 12 December 2009) La Via Campesina will highlight the huge impact of industrial agriculture on the climate as well as on people's lives and lands all over the world at the Axelborg building in Copenhagen on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December. The Axelborg building at the crossroads between Axelborg/Vesterbrogade in Copenhagen represents much of what is wrong with the world's food and agricultural system.

Axelborg is the headquarters of the Danish Agriculture and Food Council – which includes the Danish Meat Council who represent Danish Crown and Tican – the big players in industrialized meat production in Denmark.

Denmark exports over 85% of the pork it produces to markets all over the world. This excess is produced mainly by “putting...soybeans through pigs”, as the incumbent Danish Commissioner for agriculture Marian Fischer Boel has said.

This type of intensive production is based on imported soy which is transported thousands of miles, grown on lands in the south which have been cleared of forests and their inhabitants, which use huge amounts of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides – cannot be green-washed. It is part of a transnational system of production and distribution which has used up the world's resources at an unprecedented rate in order to create huge wealth for a tiny minority.

Agriculture in Denmark has been driven by this philosophy for many years – leading to an unprecedented concentration of land ownership, industrialization of production and a clear orientation towards production for export. This process has been disastrous for many Danish peasants. Danish rural communities have been destroyed and the environment degraded and polluted. Danish peasants in Frie Boender want to send a clear message – that the policies of the Danish agro-export industry are a concrete example for Europe and the rest of the world of how NOT to manage your agricultural systems.

The agribusinesses which profit from these processes are heating up the earth, destroying livelihoods and eradicating the very kind of peasant agriculture which offers real solutions.

Sustainable peasant production and food sovereignty can cool the earth, protect biodiversity and relocalize production and consumption – reducing transport and energy use. The family farmers and peasants of La Via Campesina from all over the world are coming to Copenhagen to show that the time of the current model – endless growth, waste, profit and environmental and social destruction – is over: and that Food Sovereignty is the only just, sustainable and existing way to feed the world.

Join us at Axelborg on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December at 12PM – for the end of the industrial, agro-export world.

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