



**Comitato Italiano per la  
Sovranità Alimentare**



## STATEMENT

**of the Italian Committee for Food Sovereignty  
and the Italian Coalition Against Poverty – GCAP Italy**

**G8 Agriculture – 18/20 April 2009**

### **“FOOD AT THE CENTER, AGRICULTURE EVERYWHERE!”**

This year Italy will host the G8 summit in the midst of a financial crisis that came on top of a previous food and energy crisis and has become an economic crisis with consequences for the real economy and the well-being of families. In addition the recent world default is now impacting on two structural crises, those of climate and global governance.

None of these crises was foreseen by the authorities, none of them has been addressed with proper strategies or a sense of responsibility: Only palliative answers have been provided, in perfect continuity with the same policies that were responsible for the domino effect of this one. As Albert Einstein said, *“It is madness to continue to continue to do the same thing, hoping for a different outcome”*. The result is a strong sense of a lack of foresight and management capacity on the part of the very global leadership that purports to guide the world.

Most importantly, the food crisis has once more highlighted the need to acknowledge the original role of agriculture, putting this sector at the top of government priorities and policies. Until the wild increase in the cost of food which in only two years left a further 100 million men, women and children facing the risk of starvation, agriculture was considered as a secondary sector, merely an obstacle to the finalization of an international trade agreement. A symptomatic example is the drastic reduction of public aid to agriculture from a maximum of 18.1% in 1979 to 3.5% in 2004, as pointed out with an obvious sense of guilt by the World Bank.

Moreover, the few resources available were dedicated to the development of an export-oriented agricultural production model dealing with a limited number of commodities, a model that revealed itself to be fragile, unsustainable in terms of energy consumption, and of benefit only to restricted elites in both north and south. A model that is a prey to price volatility and indifferent to food security. To us it has always been clear that it is around food and agriculture that social relationships are built, as well as local governance, the sovereignty of nations and the right to food. Agriculture is a productive sector that generates wealth and ensures employment more than any other sector in the world.

Restoring agriculture to its rightful role also means recognizing the agricultural work carried out by one billion 300 million people active in the sector, about 50% of the world’s entire workforce. A part of this whole is composed of wage-earning workers and seasonal hands who in many countries are not guaranteed labour rights, contract tutelage or a measure of social security. Furthermore, in the

agricultural sector as in other sectors all over the world there is a consistent amount of child labour and exploitation of immigrants.

The dismantling of internal agro-systems and entrusting food supply to anonymous “global tradesmen” caused the crisis to strike even harder, emphasizing the fact that an agriculture without land-workers generates consumers without food.

The actual quantity of food at our disposal today was never available to humanity in the past: according to FAO data, it would be sufficient to feed twelve billion people. In 2007/2008 (years of food crisis) the production of cereals, the basic foodstuffs for the whole planet, reached record heights, but the convergence of rising oil prices and bio-fuel production combined with financial speculation, factors exogenous to the agro-food sector, brought about a spiral of inflation which struck consumers hard without at the same time improving the income of farmers.

The deregulation of financial speculation has allowed the diffusion of unsustainable monocultures for export-oriented agro-fuel production, appropriating agriculturally productive lands without contributing to climate mitigation. This is why we are asking for an immediate moratorium on long-chain agro-fuel monocultures and the separation of financial interests from food and our agrarian heritage, over which is now falling the long shadow of the paper economy in search of remunerative assets after the recent burst of the “dot-com” bubbles.

In this scenario Africa is paying the highest price. This is the continent with the highest recorded index of agricultural employment and the highest number of people affected by food insecurity, where climate change has produced its most devastating effects, where the worst structural adjustment plans have been implemented, with cuts in public funding, elimination of services to agriculture (supply of inputs, credit, technical assistance) and of instruments for supply management. Thus Africa has increased its exportation of agricultural products while increasing out of all proportion its food imports, its debts and its political vulnerability. In addition, many geopolitical interests have recently been converging on the continent, linked to control of its fertile lands and natural resources or aimed at appropriating its expanding market. On the one hand, banks, enterprises, investors, agri-businesses and non-African governments are focusing their speculative investments on the continent with an eye to its abundant resources; on the other, Africa is being urged to conduct its agricultural development along widespread and old-fashioned lines such as those of the new “green revolution” in order that profit can be made through the sale of industrially produced seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, damaging the health of the environment and increasing the indebtedness of farmers.

An alternative path to the development of African agriculture and the satisfaction of food requirements has been proposed by farmers’ organizations, stock-breeders and fishermen, who assert the capacity of Africa to address its own food requirements and make this platform the subject of negotiations with regional and international institutions. These organizations are creating a continental platform composed of regional networks of agricultural workers capable of engaging in dialogue with the African Union and other inter-governmental institutions, with the aim of protecting the interests of African populations.

These organizations claim that the food production model based on family farming and agro-ecological methods would, if supported by adequate funding, be able to address the food demand of the whole continent. This would require both regional and national agricultural policies - formulated with the participation of relevant social actors - aimed at:

- reintroducing services to agriculture abolished under structural adjustment programmes;
- orienting investments toward rural economies and infrastructures;

- building local and regional markets and protecting them from unfair competition resulting from the over-production of industrial and subsidised agriculture in other parts of the world;
- safeguarding agricultural workers' access to land and other natural resources.

In particular, agronomic and production systems demanding great quantities of water are currently among the major causes of the global water emergency. The extraction of water from natural ecosystems for use in agricultural systems mainly dedicated to producing exports deprives local communities of an essential public asset, particularly in poor countries.

To ensure internal food security and a fair income for food producers both in the north and in the south there is a need to protect local markets. Countries must be guaranteed the right to promote the local markets by means of specific measures aimed at limiting the effects of dumping as well as of other deleterious practices of international trade, such as the granting of export subsidies. The right to Food Sovereignty must be the guiding principle in negotiations at any level (multilateral and bilateral) and an effective multilateral decision-making context must be ensured, in which the role of the United Nations and their agencies is central to the *global governance* system. The priority of local markets and short production chains must be acknowledged at all institutional levels in order to avoid their becoming an easy field of action for wide internationally-organized distribution.

This would make it possible to ensure that there is a rural space rich in terms of both population and agriculture (*It is better to have a neighbour than a desert for a neighbour*), mitigation of climatic chaos, freedom from the need for fossil sources of energy, protection and re-establishment of soil fertility, cost-effectiveness in agriculture, quality and safety of products, all strictly linked to local agro-biodiversity and to the amount of work demanded for their production. Basically, a specific strategy is required, aimed at ensuring the sound management of the territory and its natural resources, social cohesion, an economy based on needs and rights, food sovereignty and the security *tout court* of all countries.

These are not ideological issues, but practices that social organizations are spreading all over the planet: the capitalization of best methods linked to local markets, the spread of the organic agricultural system as a rural development model rather than a mere technique, the establishment of shared research practices in which farmers become co-proprietors of innovative systems, are concrete ways through which rural communities can be placed once more in the centre of development processes, where they rightly must play a leading role.

A small-scale ecological model for agriculture is not an unrealistic solution; it is also warmly advocated by the 400 experts who produced the IAASTD report, promoted by the World Bank and the FAO and subscribed to by around 60 countries. This report, seemingly wilfully ignored by the international community, states that GMOs do not represent a real option to ensure food security, the welfare of peasants and the solution to climate change. Transgenic cultivation not only keeps the whole agricultural system within the logic of industrial organizations but also introduces through patents and crop contracts a form of control over food production that is a threat to global food security. All that, added to the risks of genetic pollution that threaten the integrity of natural bio-diversity and food production, makes GMOs an unsustainable production model.

Policies aiming at investing in agro-ecological agriculture, the centrality of rural work and the right to nutrition and food security, must become priorities for public authorities and international institutions. We are worried about the increasing number of organisms claiming to exercise authority over food and agriculture which merely waste energy and prevent any democratic and transparent dialogue with representatives of the society affected. The proposal launched by the French Government for a Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security has still to be discussed, to find ways of encouraging greater participation than has so far been achieved and to obtain maximum benefit from the legitimate international organizations dedicated explicitly to guaranteeing people's right to food, particularly the

FAO. We hope that this will happen as soon as possible and that all countries will contribute to the current debate and also provide the necessary financial resources.

The issue of governance is crucial at present. International organizations dealing with agriculture have to improve their effectiveness and show they are able to give proper support to food producers whose present weakness and dependence on economic and financial institutions can only worsen the situation.

For these reasons we are asking the Agriculture Ministers of G8 countries:

- to invest in an agricultural model based on agro-ecological principles, with priority given to local markets, universal access to natural resources and their management, and family-scale agricultural production, and the exclusion of technologies inappropriate for social and environmental equilibrium, commencing with an immediate moratorium on GMOs;
- to support multilateral processes and mechanisms of governance which include the presence and participation of social organisms, based on principles of autonomy and representation, for the definition of agricultural policies based on the sovereignty of food; to see and accept the social organisms of food producers as prime interlocutors and to institute a single seat of global governance of food and agriculture centred on the United Nations organizations based in Rome;
- to safeguard people's right to food also by prohibiting the use of deleterious financial practices applied to agricultural commodities;
- to give due status to agricultural labour, affirming the workers' rights to be represented and protected through their unions by means of appropriate legislation for social support, and to take vigorous action together with the social organizations to tackle the problem of the use of illegal and clandestine labour;
- to promote all processes of high ecological quality, the values and practice of fair trade and the autonomous regulation of supply and demand (aided where possible by instrumental public purchase), so that through the enhancement of agro-biodiversity, small and medium-scale processing and local production systems a viable and concrete alternative to the channels of large-scale distribution may be established;
- and we ask the Governments of G8 countries to commit more consistent funds to Public Aid to Agricultural and Rural Development with the aim of returning to the levels reached in 1979.