

Rio+20 : Opening Statement of the Farmers Major Group

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**Read by Henry Saragih, international coordinator of La Via Campesina at the opening of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20**

(June 20, 2012, Rio de Janeiro)

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Mr. Chair, Heads of States, Your Excellencies and esteemed representatives, we have been debating the future of the planet and humanity for the past two years. It is clear that sustainable agriculture is essential to the discussion on sustainable development.

Our constituencies include: farmers, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, agricultural workers, youth and indigenous peoples. They are often among the most affected by multiple crises, in particular women and young people. They also hold the solutions for sustainable development in their hands.

In order to be able to implement systems that nourish our people and sustain our planet, institutional change is necessary, particularly in the area of participation and empowerment of the most vulnerable, the majority of whom reside in rural areas. The new path of development entails the empowerment of these constituencies to produce and harvest, this requires the rights to equitable access to land tenure – regardless of gender, marital status, religious or ethnic origins – and to productive resources, including seeds, inputs, trade and markets.

Many consider the concept of food sovereignty to be a comprehensive framework which addresses the issue of poverty, food security, climate and the environment, as well as issues of peasant, human rights, and animal welfare. Food sovereignty addresses poverty in both rural and urban areas through sustainable local food systems. Food sovereignty, which places at its center sustainable family farming, peasant agriculture and small scale fishing not only feeds the people with healthy, nutritious culturally appropriate food, but it puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of the food systems and policies rather than the demands of corporations.

The pathway to a more sustainable future must move towards socially responsible and sustainable markets and finance; balancing human needs with those of the ecosystems upon which all life depends.

Our constituency produces all the world's food and fibre needs and requires a framework that allows for the growth of more sustainable practices such as organic agriculture, innovative farming techniques and integrated management. In this, we give special attention to the needs of family farmers, peasants and artisanal fishers.

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