

Good morning. I am Elizabeth Mpofu of Zimbabwe. I am a peasant farmer. I farm ecologically, and I am committed to building food sovereignty in Zimbabwe, in Africa and in the world.

I speak to you as the global coordinator of La Via Campesina, the worldwide movement of peasant and small-scale farmers, farm workers, landless peasants, indigenous people, rural youth and rural women.

It is a great honor for me to inaugurate this "Critical Dialog on Food Sovereignty." For those of us here in the delegation of La Via Campesina, it is very gratifying to see academics, researchers and specialists, from universities around the world, come together, for the second time, to debate a concept developed by peasants ourselves.

For us this means that we peasants are finally being taken seriously. It means we have a voice. A voice that is heard. It means we are no longer invisible.

For more than one hundred years, the great thinkers have predicted that we peasants would disappear. But we have not disappeared. We have resisted wars of extermination, and bad policies designed to drive us off our land and give the food system to the corporations.

As peasants we believe that we are on this Earth for a reason. And that reason is to grow food. Food for our families, food for our communities, food for our countries. Healthy food. Food that is grown with respect for the Mother Earth. While we may not have had a high level of formal education, that does not mean we cannot think for ourselves, and organize ourselves into a powerful global movement of resistance. But we are not

just resisting, we are also trying to build something new, a better world; with our ideas, and with our actions.

Foremost among our ideas for how to build a better world, has been Food Sovereignty. We developed this approach through sharing our diverse experiences as peasants, in Africa, in Asia, in America and in Europe.

Through this dialog across our differences, we came up with something new. Something that is our gift to humanity. This is the idea that we can all struggle together to build Food Sovereignty.

While it is true that Food Sovereignty comes from La Via Campesina, we do not have a patent on the concept. Rather we invite all sectors of Society to add their contributions to it. In that spirit, the peasant spirit, our community spirit of sharing and generosity, we look forward to the contributions of all of you who are gathered here today. We want to hear your questions, your doubts, your suggestions, your constructive criticisms. And we want to struggle together with you for a better food system.

World-wide, peasants, pastoralists, fisher-folk and other small-scale food producers provide some 70% percent of the food consumed by humanity, even though we probably only hold a quarter of all farm land. In Africa, we women farmers do about 70% of farm work, and we grow about 80% of the food. Peasants, and especially peasant women, feed today's world.

This is what we are defending. It is also a good starting point from which to build Food Sovereignty. Food Sovereignty in which peasant farmers,

and especially peasant women, will be able to keep feeding humanity, while enjoying a life with dignity, in harmony with our Mother Earth.

In La Via Campesina, we see Agrarian Reform and the defense of territory, along with agroecology and local food systems, as key pillars in Food Sovereignty.

My community, Shashe, in Masvingo province in Zimbabwe, shows how agrarian reform and agroecology can produce Food Sovereignty. We got our land by an occupation, that was legalized by an agrarian reform. We grow our food agroecologically, and we produce much more food on the land, than was produced by the large landowners who had the land before. We are now opening a peasant agroecology school in our community, that will serve several countries in our region of Africa.

In fact, La Via Campesina now has more than 40 peasant agroecology schools, in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe. Right now we are in the process of opening new regional schools in Zimbabwe, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, India, Colombia, Chile, Guatemala and Nicaragua.

We are developing farmer-to-farmer and community-to-community processes of agroecology in our territories around the world. The recovery and strengthening of peasant seed systems goes hand-in-hand with agroecology. Without our own seeds, there can be no agroecology. Without agroecology, we cannot build food sovereignty.

We have consistently found, through our own research, that agroecological peasant farming, based on our own seeds and our own knowledge, is more productive and has lower production costs than

conventional agriculture. We have found this in places as diverse as Cuba, India, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Brazil. We find that when families transform their farms through the recovery of ancestral practices and through agroecology, and stop buying chemicals, there is a significant positive impact on the peasant family economy. They produce a greater diversity of products and become more autonomous. They get out of debt. And we find that people are eager to buy their ecologically-produced food products.

This is how we build Food Sovereignty from below.

But while it is essential that we peasants build Food Sovereignty in our own homes, communities and districts, we must also fight for better and more supportive public policies. We can point to our local successes in the policy debates, to show that the alternatives do indeed work, and work better. But we must build alliances and mobilization capacity to put better policies in place. Food Sovereignty policies.

We must roll back the neoliberal seed laws, that criminalize peasant seeds and open the doors to GMOs.

We must stop our governments from opening our borders to cheap, imported, unhealthy food, and from opening the door to land grabbing corporations.

We must stop Free Trade and Investment agreements.

We must call for policies to support farmer-led research on agroecology. That support the recovery of traditional seeds, and plant breeding done by peasant farmers ourselves.

We have seen how government programs to buy food produced by peasants can strengthen the peasant economy, especially programs to buy ecological products from peasants. We must make those programs and policies much more common.

We must force our governments to carry our genuine land reforms. In Brazil, in Indonesia, in Zimbabwe, and in countless other countries, we have seen that land reform is only implemented when peasants carry out land occupations. So we must build our capacity to occupy and defend land.

We must work harder to incorporate women and youth in leadership roles in our movements, and in productive activities.

To do all of these things, all of which are part of building Food Sovereignty, we must build alliances.

Alliances with all the sectors of Society who would benefit from a better food system. The urban poor, consumers, environmentalists, trade unions, and more.

We took a big step forward in 2007 in Nyéléni in Mali, when we invited global movements of women, environmentalists, unions, indigenous people and others, to join us in the World Forum for Food Sovereignty.

The documents that came from the dialogs in Nyéléni, revealed a significant broadening of the ideas of Food Sovereignty. That is because Food Sovereignty was no longer just a dialog among farmers, but rather a dialog among many sectors.

That leads me to my final point.

At the Yale Conference on Food Sovereignty, some academics and analysts were concerned that La Via Campesina seems to have a new and different definition of Food Sovereignty after every meeting and forum.

Maybe they think this reflects a lack of seriousness on our part. But that would be a misunderstanding.

We are not trying to create the perfect definition, for a dictionary or for a history book. We are trying to build a movement to change the food system and the world.

To build a powerful movement, you need to add more allies. And as you add more allies, you have more voices. More contributions. More issues to take into account. So your concept grows, it evolves, it broadens. To understand what Food Sovereignty is for La Via Campesina, yes, it is a vision of the food system we are fighting for, but, above all, it is a banner of struggle, and ever evolving banner of struggle.

GLOBALIZE THE STRUGGLE!!!

GLOBALIZE HOPE!!!