

**Contact:**

Marina Litvinsky  
FIAN International  
litvinsky@fian.org  
+49(0)1578 1886732

## **PROTECT PEOPLE'S LANDS, WATER and FORESTS**

*Civil Society Urges the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) to Adopt Effective Land Tenure Guidelines to Ensure Food Security and Respect for Human Rights*

**Rome, Italy, 7 October, 2011** -- As the final round of intergovernmental negotiations on the Guidelines on Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, at FAO headquarters in Rome, October 10-14, approaches, CSOs remind all governments of their immense responsibilities in reaching an agreement on one of the most pressing issues of our time: how to secure and sustain equitable access and tenure rights to land, fisheries, forests and natural resources for indigenous peoples and small-scale producers, particularly women. These responsibilities stem from the legal obligations of States to uphold human rights - the rights to adequate food, housing, health and work - and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Ensuring access to and control over natural resources, including land, water, fisheries and forests, for small-scale producers, indigenous peoples and peoples in conflict and occupation zones is of paramount importance for local and national food security and for food sovereignty. Addressing these issues has become all the more urgent in light of the global food crisis, and the destabilisation of local communities, as more and more lands are being transferred to agribusiness corporations and concession-holders. Nomadic pastoralists and all communities depending on common pool resources are particularly affected.

The High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the CFS has recently stated, in its second report, that large scale investment in land is damaging food security, incomes, livelihoods and environment for local people. The HLPE called on governments to

- Recognize the right to free, prior and informed consent in relation to the land and natural resources on which they depend for their livelihoods;
- Secure the access and use of lands for peasants, pastoralists, forest dwellers, fisherfolk and indigenous peoples;
- Undertake redistributive land policies in settings marked by inequality in land control and ownership;
- Abolish targets and subsidies on biofuels; and
- Prioritize investment in the small farm sector and in alternative food systems that are socially inclusive and just as well as environmentally sustainable, using agro-ecological principles.

CSOs are concerned that although food security was added to the title of the Guidelines (*Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*) and has been recognized as one of the Guidelines' major goals, the current text still lacks a coherent focus on small-scale food producers, and food insecure, poor and marginalized groups, who should be central to the debate.

Powerful governments and the private sector insist on presenting economic growth, the strengthening of markets and corporate investments as magic bullets to achieve food security, despite much evidence to the contrary.

Furthermore, these governments do not accept - and even try to weaken - any policy measures that move beyond market mechanisms, such as restitution, redistribution and the establishment of mandatory regulations aimed at guaranteeing security of tenure and safeguards vis-à-vis investments in favour of indigenous peoples, peasants, fisherfolk and nomadic pastoralists.

Faliry Boly, secretary general of Sexagon, a peasant organization in Mali, states, "The problem is obvious. Agribusiness projects such as the ones comprising thousands of hectares in the Office du Niger, Mali, do great harm and are profoundly illegitimate. We call on parliaments and national governments to immediately cease all massive land grabs current or future and return the plundered land."

Of particular concern for CSOs has been the widespread hostility of states to recall their human rights obligations related to land, fisheries and forests. Fearing that the Guidelines are creating new obligations or are becoming too prescriptive, many governments are doing all they can to weaken the language and the recommendations.

“For indigenous peoples, this attitude is particularly worrying because the first draft of the Guidelines falls far behind the rights recognized in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). How can governments build any accountability of governance at the national and international level if they don't apply the international human rights framework to land, fisheries and forests?” said Jorge Stanley Icaza, an indigenous representative.

CSOs acknowledge that many countries are seriously committed to adopting the Guidelines and call on all governments to follow this constructive approach. Despite the complexity of issues, it is possible to successfully conclude the negotiations in October. Unduly delaying the adoption of the Guidelines would severely undermine the credibility of governments and multilateral institutions in tackling the global food crisis.

“We demand that governments, the Regional Unions of States, FAO and other national and international institutions immediately implement the commitments that were made at the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) of 2006, and adopt strong Guidelines based on an equitable access to natural resources,” said Margaret Nakato from the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers. “A rural development based on agro-ecological and small-scale food production is essential to achieve food sovereignty for the welfare of all and for a sustainable future for the planet.”

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