

## **PRESS STATEMENT BY SMALLHOLDER FARMERS AND FISH HARVESTERS**

*Farmers' Convergence, Peoples' Global Forum, Johannesburg, August 2002*

We, the small-scale farmers meeting as a **Small-Scale Farmers Convergence** at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) from 22 August to 1 September 2002:

**Affirm:** that farming and fishing is our life. It is our culture.

**Believe:** that small holder [family] farming has provided food, employment, healing, spiritual inspirations and has been a central basis for social education and skills development over generations.

**Know:** that the earth was created with all that is needed for people, animals and all its sustenance and continuity.

**Recognize:** that the smallholder farmers are a majority, constituting 70 percent of the total world's population but have largely been unheard and un-noticed.

We therefore come here to speak as a united voice and alongside other civil society actors to: governments, the United Nations and the rest of the world so that our issues and recommendations will be an integral part of the deliberations and outcomes of WSSD.

Under the **Small Farmer Convergence**, 300 small-scale farmers from Africa, Latin America, Canada, Europe and Asia are here to:

- ❑ Celebrate farming and fishing as a culture – our way of life;
- ❑ Share our knowledge, experiences and strategies on enhancing biodiversity, seed multiplication, storage and exchange among ourselves;
- ❑ Communicate to you so that we can be part of the answer to sustainable development; and,
- ❑ Build a solidarity that will shape our common destiny in partnership with the earth and her people.

We, therefore, state:

1. That land, water, plant and animal genetic resources and minerals have been communally owned throughout generations and, therefore, should never be transferred to private ownership for selfish and profit driven gains. We have a stewardship responsibility handed over from past generations to tend the earth and leave it for future generations;
2. That the rich knowledge, best practices and technologies developed by us farmers in providing farming, healing, worship and marketing of our farm produce should never be alienated from us because they form the core of the our existence and

livelihood. Research should focus and build on this knowledge and practice and must respond to farmers needs;

3. That avoidable conflicts and wars have dodged the small-scale farmers and poor communities in Africa for far too long. Those in authority have ignored the soft voices of women and children crying and others dying. The Western countries have gladly traded arms and propaganda to fuel these conflicts. We demand a stop to the merciless killing of innocent people. Farmers cannot produce food under these conditions;
4. Small-scale farmers have evolved systems of seed exchange and multiplication for future seasons and generations. This is key to food sovereignty at family and national levels.

We say **NO** to genetically modified foods. We do not need genetically modified seeds. Our indigenous seeds are superior for our taste and style of farming. We small-scale farmers farm for people and not for industry!;

5. That our first priority is to feed our communities before growing for the external market. We, therefore, call for internal market access in preference to external competitors. Capacity building, extension services and improvement of infrastructure in terms of roads, communication and markets must enhance this.

Full access to the international market must be accompanied with consideration on equity, justice and the production environment;

6. That deliberate and urgent steps must be taken to develop and promote alternative renewable energy options, sustainable land-use systems and water management as a commitment to achieving sustainable development for all;
7. That poor communities, consisting mainly of labourers, landless people and small scale farmers and their families, have suffered most from HIV/AIDS. We are also concerned that common childhood diseases and other preventable diseases, such as malaria and TB, have continued to decimate our populations at an alarming rate. Health for all must be made a reality;
8. Our communal resources (land, forests, wildlife, minerals, water etc.) have been plundered by a few powerful people and private companies to the detriment of all. Further the pollution and degradation of the earth has been blamed on the poor communities, paying a blind eye to the big industries that are responsible for industrial waste and gas emissions.

Everybody must be responsible for ensuring a safe, clean and sustainable world.

9. That foreign debt has continued to cripple poor countries' economies with serious consequences on food security, health and education impacting most heavily on women and children. We therefore call for further debt cancellation and a re-dedication of these funds to services provision for poverty eradication.

**As small-scale farmers we have some answers – we will show the way.**