



Radical Food Systems Transformation, Not Climate Crisis Profiteering!

Statement of rural peoples and advocates to Parties of the UNFCCC @ the COP 28

Global food systems are expected to take center stage at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties 28 (COP 28). As global temperatures continue to rise with significant contributions from food systems, which in turn are affected by increasingly catastrophic climate impacts, Parties will discuss how food systems can become 'sustainable' to stay within the target of 1.5°C.

However, the trajectory of 'food systems transformation' as steered by world leaders through the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) portends the trajectory of the food and climate talks. As how the UNFSS gave big agri-food corporations a free pass for their culpability in world hunger and the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, so are Parties of the UNFCCC giving big polluters a free pass for their historical and continuing emissions. Worse, transnational corporations (TNCs) are being given the green light to accelerate schemes to profit from the climate crisis that they themselves created.

TNCs are using the climate crisis to consolidate their control over global food systems, delay fossil fuel phaseout, and create new avenues for profiteering—all at the expense of rural peoples who feed the world and safeguard our natural resources. Under the guise of climate action, international institutions, governments, and multi-stakeholder alliances have been funding, implementing, and legitimizing colonial and plunderous schemes by corporations to grab land and natural resources for carbon offsets, and lock-in farmers to new products and technologies that are equally, if not more destructive to the planet.

False climate 'solutions' have not only been proven to exacerbate the climate crisis by failing to address its root cause. Climate crisis profiteering has also led to the increased displacement, rights violations, hunger and marginalization of rural peoples, especially in the Global South.

We say enough! Rural peoples demand real climate solutions that are anchored on radical food systems transformation. To truly address the climate crisis, Parties to the COP 28 must ensure the following:



Transform food systems away from fossil fuels towards agroecology and people's food sovereignty

Derived from fossil fuels, chemical pesticides and fertilizers contribute heavily to climate change. Their widespread use is responsible for soil degradation, increased pest outbreaks, and pollution, exacerbating the already worsening impacts of climate change on food systems.

The agrochemical and fertilizer industries benefit greatly from the fossil fuel economy. Yet, they are positioning themselves as climate champions to cash in on opportunities provided by lucrative markets for carbon offsets and 'climate-friendly' products. Through initiatives such as the US-led Aim4Climate, hundreds of millions of dollars are being poured into TNC-led development and promotion of 'climate-smart,' 'precision' and 'regenerative' agriculture that involve the use of

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herbicides, proprietary gene-edited or genetically modified seeds and biological products, ultra-processed and laboratory-made food and feed, and digital technologies to more efficiently promote the use of chemical inputs and measure soil carbon credits. These false climate 'solutions' hinge on questionable emissions cuts claims and risky technologies, while perpetuating the fossil fuel economy and laying the groundwork for almost total corporate control over food systems. For example, through incentivized carbon farming, fertilizer, agrochemical and seed, and technology TNCs are able to monitor and dictate all aspects of 'farm management,' and to access and use farmers' data to expand their markets.

We must slam the brakes on TNC profiteering in the sham race to 'net zero.' It further erodes people's food sovereignty—or the power of people and communities to assert and realize the right to food and produce food—and endangers human health and the environment.

Agroecology, a community-led approach to production that integrates local, indigenous, and scientific knowledge and practices to enhance biodiversity, sustain ecosystems, and center decision-making on farmers is the way forward. Appropriate technology and sufficient public resources must support people-led agroecology as an alternative to TNC-controlled fossil fuel-based food production and consumption. Agroecological practices must be delinked from carbon markets that give big polluters a license to pollute.

For agroecology to flourish and people's food sovereignty to be realized, neoliberal policies imposed by the World Trade Organization and IMF-World Bank must be discontinued. **Countries must be allowed to prioritize local production for domestic needs.** This will lessen the energy-intensive transport of products; liberate people, land and resources from the extractive and destructive demands of profit-oriented global markets; and ensure people's access to affordable and healthy food that supports local producers.



End corporate monopoly over land, water, and natural resources

Land grabbing has intensified under the mantle of so-called 'nature-based solutions'. Biofuel plantations, some big 'conservation' and renewable energy projects, and green bonds to finance the operations of big agribusinesses have accelerated deforestation and the loss of the world's natural carbon sinks. They have displaced farmers and Indigenous Peoples in the Global South, usually through violent eviction. Climate-friendly, biodiverse farming practices have been replaced by monocultures under exploitative working conditions. Studies show that biofuels, which take away land from food production, are worse for the climate than gasoline.

For the past two decades, investment firms, biofuel producers, and large agribusinesses have acquired almost 83 million hectares of land and its freshwater resources, mostly in Africa and Asia. Globally, only 1% of farms now operate 70% of farmlands. This trend of extreme land concentration is likely to continue with the aid of land-based carbon offset schemes, as carbon credits generated from land become an increasingly sought-after financial asset. One report estimates that the total amount of land required for carbon offsets to reach 'net-zero' pledges made by corporations and governments could be five times the size of India.

Climate-driven techno-fixes, including digital infrastructure, also require greater extraction of rare earth minerals, unleashing a new wave of destructive mining and land and ocean grabs. The booming hydrogen industry to produce 'green' energy requires massive amounts of land and water resources, mostly in the Global South where most projects are located. Geoengineering—or large-scale interventions in the earth's oceans, soils and atmosphere—encroaches on territories of rural peoples and threatens ecosystems on which they depend.

There must be no land and resource grabs under the banner of 'net zero.' There must be no public subsidies to incentivize unjust, harmful and false solutions that reinforce corporate monopoly over land, water and natural resources.

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A just food and energy transition is only possible when rural food producers and Indigenous Peoples control their land, territories, water, and natural resources. Countries must advance a genuinely redistributive land and agrarian reform program, a pro-people aquatic and fisheries reform, and instill policies to protect natural resources from domestic and foreign plunder.



Polluters must pay for climate crisis destruction

Rural communities who bear the brunt of climate change impacts must be justly compensated. The Loss and Damage Fund must be financed by the profits of the biggest polluters from the wealthiest countries, and must not be on a voluntary basis. **It should be based on their historical and current obligation to compensate the Global South for the destruction caused by the climate crisis, and be unconditionally given in the form of aid and grants to support programs freely determined by affected communities.** The US-controlled World Bank, which will use the opportunity to dry public coffers to guarantee profits for private corporations, should stay out of the L&D Fund. Instead, it should be managed by an independent and credible entity acceptable to the Global South and will ensure easy access for all countries claiming climate compensation.

Climate financing should uphold the principles of common but differentiated responsibility and respect national ownership and sovereignty. Channeling climate finance through loans adds to the debt burden of low and middle income countries and must stop. Countries must reject climate financing that insists on harmful, unjust, and false climate solutions.



End fossil fueled wars vs. rural communities

Militaries are exempt from climate commitments, despite being among the world's biggest consumers of fossil fuels and accounting for an estimated 5.5% of global GHG emissions. This unjust blanket carve-out must end. There must be greater transparency and accountability on military contributions to the climate crisis.

The US, the world's largest military force, and other militaries must stop destructive wars of aggression and occupation. Rural peoples are most affected by these imperialist wars, usually accompanied by food blockades, destruction of crops, and other rights violations. **As land and environmental defenders, farmers and Indigenous Peoples must not be subjected to militarization and other forms of violence and repression.**



Ensure genuine participation of rural peoples in climate policy

Rural peoples—the small farmers, landless, Indigenous Peoples, agricultural workers, rural women and youth, pastoralists and fishers—have lost the most, and stand to lose the most, from the climate crisis. **Rural peoples must be allowed to shape the climate agenda through genuine participation in decision-making at local, national, and international levels.**

For rural peoples, nature is not a commodity but the bedrock of life. They are in the best position to safeguard land and resources from further biodiversity loss, degradation, and depletion. As stewards of lands, forests, and coastal areas, the role of rural peoples at the forefront of climate adaptation and mitigation must be recognized by placing them at the forefront of climate policy. Rural peoples must not be used to advance profiteering schemes designed to further trample upon their rights and welfare.

Countries must reflect rural peoples' demands for food, land, and climate justice in binding commitments. Plans for the transition of food and energy systems must align with peoples' pathways towards just, equitable, healthy, and sustainable futures.

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This statement will be presented at a Rural Peoples' Speak-Out @ COP28 + sent to National Focal Points of Parties to the UNFCCC

For more information: www.ourfoodsystems.org