

## THE RIO BRANCO COMMITMENT



We, over 100 representatives of farmers, fishermen, indigenous peoples, extractivists, artisans and NGOs from 32 countries, meeting in Rio Branco, Acre, Brazil, at the international workshop “Growing Diversity” from 9 to 19 May 2002, decided to make the following statement

- Considering that biodiversity is an invaluable heritage, which is being destroyed at an unprecedented rate.
- Reminding everyone that the current dominant models of the development driven by economic liberalization and corporate control, are the main cause behind the deterioration of biological diversity, reinforce social inequalities throughout the world, and undermine the sovereignty of nation states to take care of their people.
- Conscious and proud of the fundamental role of local communities and their traditional knowledge in the conservation and management of biological diversity in the past, the present and the future,
- Aware that the increasingly powerful multinational companies get richer and even more powerful by securing patents and other intellectual property rights over our biological resources to the detriment and at the expense of the inalienable rights of our local communities,
- Also aware that the majority of farmers in the world are women, and that they form the most vulnerable group which is adversely being affected by the destruction of biodiversity and their livelihoods.
- Considering that biodiversity in many of our communities is intrinsically linked to - and integral part of - our cultures, our religions, and our spirituality, and therefore cannot be treated as a simple commodity that can be bought, sold or wasted,

### WE DECLARE

- That local communities and indigenous peoples are the custodians of biodiversity, and that they have the inalienable right and responsibility to continue to manage, save, exchange, and further develop the biodiversity under their custody, over and above any commercial or other interests.
- Similarly, we consider food sovereignty – the right of people to sufficient and healthy food at all times - as a central principle, which should not be subject to other interests or considerations.
- We reject the current push towards a globalization that is driven predominately by commercial interests and undermines our cultures and our capacity to sustain and control our livelihoods.

- We reject the destructive and outdated development models that destroy biodiversity and the livelihoods of local communities, such as big dam projects, indiscriminate mining and oil projects, and destructive timber extraction.
- Political instability and war in many regions of the world, are major causes of destruction of biodiversity as they uproot people, kill communities and destroy local knowledge and customs. Interests foreign to these communities cause most of this instability and these wars.
- We reject the technological packages of Green Revolution and similar technologies that are being imposed on us, including hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizer and pesticides, and inappropriate forms of mechanization.
- We declare especially our frontal opposition to GMOs, since they are a threat to our agriculture, our animals, our health and our environment;
- We reject biopiracy and the patenting of our products and knowledge because they go against our biological diversity and cultural identity. We object especially to the patenting of life forms.
- We reject the privatization of water resources, because it is a public good, a collective property and the source of all life.
- We draw the attention the depletion and pollution of aquatic resources caused by industrial fishing and other commercial interests, which undermine the livelihoods of local fishing communities.
- We also note that the world's forests and all their inhabitants are living systems, are an inherent part of life on earth. Still, these forests are being cleared by commercial interests, thus destroying huge amounts of biodiversity and undermining our very possibilities of survival.
- We especially recognize the importance of sacred forests in the customs, beliefs and livelihoods of many local communities, and we consider that they form important sanctuaries for biodiversity.
- We denounce that land is increasingly taken away from small farmers and food production and ends up in the hands of big landowners and used for the production of export commodities. This is a major cause behind the destruction of agricultural biodiversity, and we demand the effective implementation of agrarian reforms that bring land back into the hands agrarian of small farmers for the production of food.
- We especially recognize the rights of indigenous peoples to their territories and demand the immediate implementation of the Convention 169 of the ILO on the rights of indigenous peoples.

## **WE PROPOSE**

- That biodiversity based and integrated production systems under control of local communities be adopted and promoted as the principal mode of agricultural production.
- These systems should guarantee, as much as possible, the control of the local communities over de production, processing and marketing of agricultural and extractivist products.
- Our governments have the central responsibility to develop and implement policies, legislation and research to achieve this goal. For this to happen, current policies have to be redirected towards a holistic approach to development, the promotion of local control over resources and the active participation of local communities in decision making.

- Scientific research should be based on the problems faced by farmers and local communities and should consider and respect local knowledge. Scientists should be accountable for the consequences generated by the practical applications of science.
- Concern over food security and the environment should take precedence over international trade interests. The World Trade Organization is not the place to decide on these issues. Neither should regional or bilateral trade agreements affect local biodiversity management.
- We demand from our governments to ensure a GMO free environment in our countries and in our farming systems and to support our efforts to raise awareness amongst farmers and consumers about the real and potential impact of GMOs to the environment and to human health.
- We also request a total ban on the patenting of live forms and the use of any IPRs on biodiversity and traditional knowledge. We want to see the strengthening of Farmers and Community Rights in the relevant international agreements and at the national level to ensure that farmers and local communities can continue to save, exchange and further develop biodiversity.
- We demand that our education systems be reoriented and sufficiently funded to teach our children understanding of, and respect for, indigenous knowledge and locally based biodiversity management.
- The current agricultural research institutions – national and international – should be radically restructured and reoriented to promote and support biodiversity based agriculture rather than undermining it. We see locally based and farmer led research – in partnership with scientists where needed – as the best way to carry out such research.
- Similarly, current destructive practices and policies in the fields of fisheries and forestry management should be stopped and reoriented to the sustainable management of the earth's forests and fish populations.
- Sacred sites should be respected and protected by international agreements, national legislation and taken into account in national and regional development policies.
- To address, with actions and policies, the problems faced by women, in different parts of the world, concerning gender discrimination. The gender issue should be included in all the educational and development programs and should be discussed with both men and women.

## **WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO**

- Perform crop diversification and actively promote diversified integrated farming systems based on biodiversity in our communities and organizations. The use of local and traditional varieties should be promoted.
- To put up political pressure to promote public policies that that the interest of small farmers into account, and put the promotion of biodiversity central.
- To strengthen our efforts and campaigns to stop the patenting of life forms and to fight for an environment free of GMOs.
- To protect and enrich our local knowledge and organize local seed exchanges.
- Strengthen the role of women in agricultural biodiversity conservation and empower their organization in all levels.
- Organize peoples' movements. With little or no support from governments, grassroots initiatives to protect biodiversity are necessary.
- Establish an effective exchange and flow of information amongst us to coordinate future actions and campaigns against the threats to biodiversity.

- Compel governments and aid agencies to reorient their aid programs so as not to interfere with local initiatives of conservation and resource management.
- Think globally while acting locally.

Enriched and energized by our individual and collective struggles for the local management of agricultural biodiversity, we commit ourselves to this pledge of conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity. In this we promise to each other to be generous as the earth, clear as the water, strong as the wind, and as far and as close as the sun.

And before we return to our countries as a token of our pledge, today in the spirit of friendship we exchange life – we exchange our seeds of knowledge and wisdom past on from generations to generations.

Agreed in Rio Branco, May 19, 2002