



## **INTERNATIONAL FARM WORKERS FORUM**

### **Declaration of the International Farm Workers Forum in Stellenbosch, South Africa, October 5-8, 2018**

We, trade unions of farm workers and our allies, gathered in Stellenbosch, South Africa, to exchange and sharpen strategies for addressing the challenges farm workers face and to reinforce our global commitment to advance farm workers' rights and interests.

We are the many; every third worker worldwide, 1.1 billion people, work in agriculture. 40 percent of those are waged workers. It is farm workers who put the food on the table of people and who are the backbone of the rural economy. Over generations, we have fought for our rights, and won important victories. Through organizing workers into our unions, through solidarity action, through strikes, pickets and boycott campaigns we have put pressure not just on farm owners and plantation companies, but also on transnational food corporations and governments.

We note with grave concern the global attack on workers as a class in general and farm workers in particular, which deprives them of their basic rights. Leaders of rural workers trade unions and smallholder farmers' organisations are frequently victims of false imprisonment, attacks and assassinations. Our right to organize is fundamental, but violated by landlords and corporations on a daily basis. In many cases, codes of conduct and certification systems are used as a scam to hide the denial of the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

On farms, plantations and in other areas of agriculture, workers come from the most oppressed social groups. They are discriminated against on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or caste. Working conditions on plantations until today remind us of the brutal history of colonialism and slavery. Daily, we face violence and discrimination at our workplace. Some of us are forced to migrate and played out against each other.

Workers in agriculture receive poverty wages. There is almost no social security for agricultural workers compared to workers in other sectors. Existing enforcement mechanisms are poor, which means non-enforcement of laws. Women farm workers are the most affected as they are subjected to sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence. Our living conditions, including housing, sanitation and drinking water, are amongst the worst in the world. We are denied our right to have access to and sustainably use land and water bodies, individually and collectively.

Agriculture is among the most hazardous economic occupations. New pesticides, nanotechnology and GMO's , though their impact little known, pose health and safety risks to workers. Instead of technical innovation which encourages and supports agro-ecology, we are facing technical change which destroys jobs and the environment. Climate change for us is not a challenge in the future, but a menace in the present.

**We therefore demand from our governments that they:**

- Ensure freedom of association and the right to organize and collective bargaining;
- Ratify and implement international conventions and agreements relevant to the agriculture sector especially ILO Conventions 11, 110, 141 and 184;
- Ensure extension of all rights and protections conferred to workers in other sectors to the farm workers;
- Vote for the adoption and base their policies on the United Nations declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas;
- Strengthen enforcement and enhance quality of inspection in the agriculture sector;
- Ensure a living wage for farm workers;
- Ensure farm workers are covered by social security schemes and have adequate social protection;
- Combat the scams of codes of conduct and certification systems to ensure that they do not confuse the rights of workers and undermine legislation, especially the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining;
- Regulate supply chains to ensure that corporate power does not undermine the rights of farmworkers.

**We as farm workers and our trade unions, together with our allies, commit to:**

- Organize, fight, build strength and alliances with other progressive social movements, and increase political education of our membership;
- Create space for women and other social discriminated groups inside our organizations through the establishment of adequate structures and adoption of policies on equality principles in activities;

- Fight against gender-based violence especially in the form of sexual harassment within and outside our organisations;
- Deepen our solidarity and strengthen the alliances between us across borders and sectors;
- Linking up struggles of workers along supply chains;
- Fight for our demands to land and water and to protect workers who are threatened with eviction, including after land redistribution;
- Fight any attempt to divide domestic and migrant workers and work towards new strategies to get migrant workers organized.

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