



## Editorial – Migration and Agriculture

*Food is essential to life and it is also an expression of our cultures and our societies. The dominant corporate food system takes away the vital and social value of food and **reduces it to a commodity**, in order to profit from all stages of its intensive production, processing and distribution and ultimately from food speculation in the financial markets.*

*This system pushes to separate people who consume food from the ones who produce it. **While family food producers continue to feed more than 70% of the world population**, the neoliberal system and its trade policies **drive peasants, artisanal fishers, pastoralists and indigenous people out of their territories** and support the development of intensive monoculture farms and factory farms, food processing industries and retailers, based on the labour of food workers.*

*More and more, these **food and farm workers are migrant people** obliged to leave their country in order to escape poverty and hunger. More and more, due to racial migration policies and the militarization of borders **migrant people risk their lives** to cross frontiers undocumented. More and more undocumented migrants **are persecuted and criminalized** while simultaneously **being exploited and even enslaved** in the food production system, to which **they are indispensable**.*

*The struggle against the current global food system is also a struggle to support the rights of migrant people. The struggle for food sovereignty is also a struggle to give people back the freedom to choose whether to stay or leave their communities and territories.*

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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### Migration, a livelihood strategy

According to the *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, the number of international migrants was estimated at 214 million in 2010<sup>1</sup> - more than the whole population of Brazil – and it is rising constantly. People migrate *within their country* (especially from rural to urban areas<sup>2</sup>) or *between countries*, often without “legal permission” and putting their lives at risk.

*Migration is a complex phenomenon* as it is the result of many different factors, such as wars, conflicts, natural disasters, new opportunities, family reunifications, etc. However **the main reason for the rise in contemporary migration is economic. Women and men migrate mostly to escape hunger and poverty.** In particular, the destruction of rural communities and peasant agriculture (including deforestation, soil exhaustion and unfair land distribution) is one of the main “push factors<sup>3</sup>” for migrating. National and international policies and trade agreements endorsed by the current neoliberal capitalist system are behind this process.

1 - World Migration Report 2010

2 - *Food and City*, Nyéléni Newsletter No 11, www.nyeleni.org

3 - A “push factor” is what induce somebody to leave their home, a “pull factor” is what attract them to a new place.

## Who we are

In the last years hundreds of organisations and movements have been engaged in struggles, activities, and various kinds of work to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organisations were present in the Nyéléni Forum 2007 and feel part of a broader Food Sovereignty Movement, that considers the Nyéléni 2007 declaration as its political platform. **The Nyéléni Newsletter wants to be the voice of this international movement.**

Organisations involved: Development Fund, ETC Group, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Food First, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, Grassroots International, IPC for food sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, Oxfam Solidarity, Real World Radio, Roppa, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, Veterinarios Sin Fronteras.

**Now is the time for Food Sovereignty!**

8 March  
International Women Day

14 March  
International Day of Action Against Dams  
and for Rivers, Water and Life!

22 March  
World Water Day

26 – 30 March  
World social Forum - Tunis, Tunisia

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movement from the grassroots.

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## Free trade agreement refugees

(extract from *The Rise and Predictable Fall of Globalized Industrial Agriculture*, IFG – Debbie Barker, 2007)

Between 1990 and 2005, the number of migrants from Mexico and Central America living in the U.S. without authorization spiked from two million to an estimated 6.2 million. **Many of these migrants could be called “NAFTA refugees.”** The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which went into effect in 1994, lifted barriers to “free” agricultural trade between North and South (...).

As part of the condition for joining NAFTA, *Mexico was required to abandon the traditional system of communal land and resource ownership (...)* and to *dismantle a system that had provided a guaranteed floor price for corn for Mexican farmers*, which had sustained over three million corn producers. As a result of NAFTA, Mexican farmers suddenly found themselves competing with an influx of cheap agricultural commodities produced by large-scale, heavily subsidized U.S. producers. Corn imports from the North grew 17-fold between 1993 and 2001 and accounted for 25 percent of Mexican corn consumption, compared to a pre-NAFTA figure of two percent. Within a year of NAFTA's passage, *Mexican production of corn and other basic grains fell by 50 percent, and millions of peasant farmers lost a significant source of their incomes.* Facing dire poverty in the Mexican countryside, **millions of farmers migrated off their lands and made the wrenching decision to leave behind families and communities and head northward.**

## The hands that prepare our food

*The whole food chain from farm to fork heavily exploits migrant labour.* Migrant workers are employed in producing, processing, packaging, distributing, preparing and selling food.

**It is a globalised food system that utilizes a migrant workforce everywhere:** from fastfood chains and factory farms in the U.S. to tea plantations in India, from slaughterhouses and intensive farms in Europe to fishing vessels in Asia and soy plantations in South America. *Generally migrant workers are under-paid and under-protected and often they are exposed to unhealthy and hazardous working conditions and physically and mentally abused.* Migrant workers are now organizing themselves to defend their rights and they are building alliances worldwide with other constituencies (such as peasants and artisanal fishers, etc.) to tackle the real cause of the current situation: **the corporate food system.**

# IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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## A migrant labour-force

With the introduction of globalised movement of capital in the neoliberal system, *transnational companies increasingly began to disconnect production from a fixed geography* – using the global economy to source materials, production no longer became tied to a single place. Companies quickly realized that a limiting factor on profit was labour costs, and so began to **organize the movement of their industries to countries or regions where labour costs were low**, organizing tax havens for their businesses in exchange for providing low paid manufacturing jobs in the host country.

*For agriculture the situation was more complex* as existing soils, trees, vines, processing infrastructure and prevalent weather conditions meant that simple relocation to zones with cheaper labour costs was not as straightforward. As farmers in Europe and the U.S. were pushed to increase production in order to compensate for lower and lower prices being paid by retailers, they began to **employ migrant labourers in increasing numbers.** Decreasing availability of local seasonal workers and a huge increase in the availability of undocumented migrant workers quickly led labour intensive agricultural enterprises to increase their use of migrant labour, resulting in the current situation *where an estimated between one and three million migrant farm workers (predominantly Mexican and undocumented workers with no legal status<sup>4</sup>) work on farms in the United States alone.* In some cases the agricultural enterprises have **begun to move overseas in order to lower their production costs.** Large organic and conventional farms being established in Northern Morocco in order to supply the E.U. market and taking advantage of more “competitive” labour costs there are one such example. This transferral of production is often accompanied and facilitated **by aggressively negotiated bi-lateral trade agreements.** The same process can be seen at work as companies involved in **landgrabbing** internationally use land (often the best agricultural land) and local labour to produce food destined only for the export market<sup>5</sup>.

States are complicit in this situation and **worldwide agricultural and migration policies are progressively more correlated.** Governments with large numbers of incoming migrants have repeatedly failed to regulate for them, refusing to introduce rights for seasonal workers and allowing the situation to worsen. Especially in the E.U. and U.S., enormous sums of money and effort are expended in keeping people beyond increasingly militarized borders, while special seasonal permits and migration policies **prevent migrant workers from settling** in the destination country or gaining any rights. As migrant workers are pushed to enter the destination country illegally, **they can be employed under the constant threat of deportation and face criminalisation and blackmail.** For neoliberal enterprise it is an ideal situation: *a cheap labour force throughout the year that can be discarded at any time or even deported back to their country of origin when they are no longer required.*

## Modern slavery<sup>6</sup>

Working conditions can eventually reach a level of exploitation that they can be considered a modern form of “slavery”. Even if it is difficult to believe, **twenty-seven million people are considered to be in slavery today.** Almost all slavery practices, including trafficking in people and bonded labour, contain some element of forced labour. This means that there are more people in slavery today than at any other time in human history. Slavery has existed for thousands of years, but changes in the world's economy and societies over the past fifty years have enabled a resurgence of slavery.

“*Modern slaves*” are forced to work for little or no pay, under the threat of violence to themselves or their families, deportation or criminalization. *Most of them are exploited in agriculture, fisheries, mining and construction, and - especially women and children - in prostitution.* **Generally illegal migration presents traffickers with opportunities to oblige or defraud undocumented migrants into involuntary servitude and exploitation, as their lack of legal status creates their invisibility.**

Undocumented people – such as many farm workers - live the contradiction of being *criminalized and chased on the one hand, and needed, desired and often exploited on the other.*

4 - *Migrant Farm Workers: Our Nation's Invisible Population*, Eduardo González, Jr. - <http://www.extension.org/pages/9960/migrant-farm-workers-our-nations-invisible-population>

5 - To know more about landgrabbing read the *Nyeléni newsletter* No 0 and No 9, [www.nyeleni.org](http://www.nyeleni.org)

6 - The information in this paragraph is taken from the *Free the slaves* website - <https://www.freetheslaves.net/SSLPage.aspx> and *Anti-slavery* website - [http://www.antislavery.org/english/slavery\\_today/default.aspx](http://www.antislavery.org/english/slavery_today/default.aspx)



## Unite in the struggle

Although invisible to most people, the presence of farm workers – migrant, seasonal or undocumented – in the rural communities of many countries is undeniable, since manual labour is still necessary for agricultural production. **The struggle of farm workers should go hand by hand with the struggle for sustainable peasant agriculture.**

*The violation of rights suffered by farm workers, especially if migrants – are caused by the same system that also exploits peasants, workers, and poor people internationally. So every struggle that demands decent employment for farm workers must also address the concentration of power in the existing corporate food system.*

We need to promote and support **policies of food sovereignty which revitalize and empower local agriculture and rural communities** everywhere and especially in the countries of origin of migrant workers.

## Agrarian reform as the solution

Neoliberal economics has considerably worsened the situation for migrant workers, not only *through the criminalization of the movement of peoples, but also through a concentration of production and land ownership which means that access to land for people across the world is becoming increasingly difficult.* Often migrant farmworkers and workers<sup>7</sup> are peasants that cannot gain a decent life in their country of origin because of the current agricultural system and global markets.

**The Food Sovereignty movement demands an integral agrarian reform**, that consists of the redistribution of good quality *land and other resources* to landless and land-poor peoples, and of the restitution or defense of the *territories* of indigenous peoples. A genuine agrarian reform guarantees peasants, indigenous peoples, artisanal fisherfolk, nomadic pastoralists and rural communities control over natural resources (land, water, fishing areas, seeds, forests, biodiversity, etc.) recognizing both collective and individual rights.

A land reform of this kind would ensure access to healthy and culturally appropriate food, would achieve job creation and social stability – **regulating international migration and the increasing migration from rural to urban areas.**

7 - For example in Indonesia in 2008 there were 3.5 million migrant workers that moved to Mid-East, Southeast Asia (Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia), and East Asia. Most of them come from rural communities, many are peasants displaced from their lands by land consolidation. <http://indiesblog.wordpress.com/2008/06/12/initial-study-on-family-and-society-of-the-migrant-workers/>

## Rights of farmers and farmworkers

*Every day the current system and its trade policies force family farmers to migrate from their rural communities to either the cities or across borders into foreign lands. In the Philippines for example, the migrants leaving the country have grown exponentially from 500.000 in the late 60's, before the so-called "green revolution", to more than 12 million.*

*Additionally rural dwellers are amongst those who are most impacted by climate change. Extreme weather conditions devastate the crops and livelihoods of millions of families, forcing many to seek work elsewhere. In 2010 alone, it was estimated that more than 30 million people were forcibly displaced by environmental and weather-related disasters across Asia.*

*At the same time, climate change "false solutions" promoted by corporations and many governments displace family farmers and rural communities from their territories. In Indonesia and Thailand, there are cases of violent displacement of entire communities in the name of "conservation" projects such as REDD (*Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation*). **It is urgent to recognize the full rights of all migrants – be they migrating for economic, political, social or climatic reasons.***

\* To know more about REDD and "false solutions" to climate change read the Nyéléni newsletter No 1 and No 10 - [www.nyeleni.org](http://www.nyeleni.org)

## Voices from the field

*Short stories from Africa, America, Asia and Europe, resistance and alternatives*

### Migrants are building rural communities

*Jille Belisario, Campaign and Program Coordinator, Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers (CFMW).*

I migrated to the Netherlands in 1986 as my mother wanted to seek political asylum. According to the current statistics there are about 12 thousand Filipino migrants in the Netherlands and 800.000 in Europe. In the Netherlands, criminal laws are increasingly integrated with migration laws, also called "crimmigration". Undocumented migrants are often criminalized and used as scapegoats for the European financial and economic crisis. The lives of undocumented migrants are becoming more and more precarious.

Migrants are transnational social actors – they work in host countries, and they contribute to the development of their countries of origin. At CFMW we are working together with Unlad Kabayan through a Migrants Saving Alternative Investment (MSAI) project. We establish ecologically sustainable projects in the country of origin that provide jobs and livelihoods in rural communities, while 4 to 5 per cent share is streamlined back to us. Some of us think of going back home, so this cooperation between peasants and workers is very important to re-build our communities together.

We also realize that we need to network with other communities and in this way strengthen unity between all migrants. We engage with social movements in Europe as the Transnational Migrants Platform and the RESPECT Network.

### A story among so many others

*Philippe Sauvin, l'autre syndicat.*

Ramadan B. from Kosovo works in Switzerland as an agricultural worker. As a citizen of Kosovo (a non-EU member) he cannot obtain a residence permit or work permit, so remains without papers, a clandestine. He came to Switzerland as thousands of others, to earn a living for himself and his family back in Kosovo. While cutting a hedge, he slips and falls, impaling himself on a vine stake support. Badly injured and bleeding heavily, his boss brings him to hospital where he is operated on immediately and saved. His boss has not insured him! *L'autre syndicat* (the Other Union) intervenes, obliging the boss to pay the 4 years of social charges he is due retroactively, allowing Ramadan's medical charges to be paid and for him to receive a salary during the two years when he is unable to work.

Today Ramadan has recovered but he can no longer use his right arm as he could before. Disability benefits are refused, and he remains clandestine and without papers, one case among so many others! *L'autre syndicat* demands the normalisation of undocumented peoples in Switzerland as it is they who undertake much work which others are unwilling to undertake (agriculture, cleaning workers, construction, etc). Exploitable due to their situation, and often under paid and not insured, undocumented migrants are the bullied in our rich country!

## Migrants are on the frontline of the struggle against neoliberalism

Carlos Marentes, Director of the Unión de Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos UTAF and member of La Via Campesina.

Agriculture is the most profitable sector of the U.S. economy and is based on the exploitation of farm workers. Eight out of ten agricultural workers in the U.S. are Mexican. We help them to organise in order to change their unfair working and living conditions. Most of them are farmers whose livelihoods have been ruined by neoliberal policies which also obliged them to migrate.

From September 11, the U.S. government launched a new security policy under which the migrant became a potential enemy, while also commencing construction of a wall along the border between Mexico and U.S. and the militarization of the border. In the last 12 years more than 4,000 immigrants have died trying to cross the border and

the wall will increase the number of victims. Today we live in even more difficult times as the campaign of persecution and criminalization of migrants has intensified since they were blamed for the so called "financial crisis" [started in 2007/2008].

Immigrants who manage to cross the border and reside in the U.S. become an exploitable, disposable and even deportable workforce. Employers abuse their rights under the pretext that the majority of workers are undocumented.

U.S. immigration policy is hypocritical. On one hand immigrants are scapegoats for the failures of the North American system and on the other they are an essential support to the economy. The neoliberal system is to blame for the 12 million people that can not live on their land and migrants are on the frontline of the struggle against neoliberalism. Download the video of the interview here [http://www.wsftv.net/Members/bfocuspuller/videos/Carlos\\_Marentes.mp4/view](http://www.wsftv.net/Members/bfocuspuller/videos/Carlos_Marentes.mp4/view)

## The world in words

### Migration should be a choice rather than a necessity

More than 1,800 delegates from over 50 countries participated into 5th World Social Forum on Migrations (WSFM) held on 26-30 November in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines. **The 5th Forum was a milestone for the expanding alliances between migrant and social movements** in Asia and throughout the world. Refugees, anti-trafficking, workers, peasants, women, faith-based and environmental justice organisations, indigenous peoples, domestic workers, trade and development, anti-racism and human rights advocates got together to find the way to change the current economic model that exploits migrants, workers and poor people internationally. Read the complete declaration of the forum at <http://www.wsfm2012.org/home/latest-news-a-updates/121-manila-declaration-5th-wsfm>

### GM maize in Mexico: An irreversible path

The Mexican government is considering allowing the planting of 2.4 million hectares [24.000 km<sup>2</sup>, a territory bigger than El Salvador or Belize] of genetically engineered maize, as requested by agribusiness giants Monsanto, DuPont, Dow and others. The Mexican Unión de Científicos Comprometidos con la Sociedad (UCCS), together with several international organisations including GRAIN, put out a report addressed to the Mexican government to **stop this totally irresponsible act in the heart of the world's centre of diversity of this crop.**

You can download the report at this address <http://www.grain.org/media/BAhbBlSjHOGZmSSI2MjAxMi8xMS8yOC8xMV80M18wNl83OTBfTU1icmllZjI3bm92MjAxMkZJTkFmLnBkZgY6BkVU>

### In Doha there is no future for the planet

Climate change jeopardizes the livelihood of millions of people worldwide and forces mass migration. Last year natural disasters, mostly weather-related such as floods and storms, displaced over 15 million people ([www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)). Even so, the 18th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC and the 8th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol - that took place from 26 November to 8 December in Doha, Qatar - delivered a comatose deal. **The industrialized countries insisted on inaction.** They found even more ways to flee their responsibility, creating more carbon markets - including now one on agriculture - and keeping up business as usual in exploiting the planet. Governments persist in supporting the interests of industry and agribusiness while peasant farmers continue to feed the world. Read La Via Campesina press release, <http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/actions-and-events-mainmenu-26/climate-change-and-agrofuels-mainmenu-75/1350-governments-produce-blank-pages-in-doha-for-planet-s-future-la-via-campesina-farmers-are-cooling-the-planet>

### 24 Hours of Feminist Action around the World

The 10 December the activists of the World March of Women carried out actions within their communities between midday and 1pm. They stayed mobilised during 24 hours, to demonstrate their **awareness of what is happening in the world, the attacks perpetrated on women's rights, and to make their acts of resistance as well as their alternatives known.** Read the declaration of the World March of Women and the Women's global charter for Humanity at <http://www.24heures2012.info/index.php/en/declaration>

## To read, listen, watch and share

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For reports and more references [www.nyeleni.org](http://www.nyeleni.org)

**One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk.** Tashunka Witko, 1840 -1877