

Timor-Leste Civil Society Statement on the
International Day of Peasant's Struggle
April 17, 2009

In 1996, the International Peasant's Movement, La Via Campesina, declared April 17th the International Day of Peasant's Struggle. This date was chosen to remember the 19 landless peasants of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra — the Landless Workers Movement, who Brazilian police killed as they tried to access land. We express our solidarity with peasants across the world and would like to reflect on the experience of Timor-Leste where most people are peasant farmers.

Colonialism and occupation saw deforestation, soil damage, separation from our land, propaganda campaigns for Indonesian foods, and the systematic undermining of local food and agriculture. Today agriculture is overlooked in a development process that builds on our aspirations, not our strengths.

Subsidizing rice imports way in excess of local food shortfalls is smothering local agriculture. It does not benefit the extremely poor who live in remote areas where rice does not get to and could not afford it even if it did. Foreign interests pushing agrofuels and cash crops, and some donors use aid to create dependency on their products, such as hybrid seeds, threaten our food production. Industrial agriculture is not sustainable, and will not feed our children's children.

Training in permaculture/agroecological techniques is a cheap and easy way of increasing soil quality, pest management, yields, seed quality and food preservation. It empowers communities, reducing the need for foreign advisors. This is just one strategy to strengthen our food sovereignty and lessen the impacts of global food price rises in Timor-Leste.

We thank Timor-Leste's farmers for feeding the majority of our people everyday. They are the back-bone of the non-oil economy. Although not perfect, our agriculture is far more sustainable than many other countries. This is due to our farmers' sophisticated technical knowledge of plant botany and other techniques.

In the year ahead, land processes under the *Ita Nia Rai* land registration program, and new land laws such as the Civil Code and Transitional Land Law, will have big impacts for all Timorese society, especially farmers. Our farmers need land to farm.

We hope that Timor-Leste can avoid the experience of so many countries, including Brazil, where people are denied access to land — even when it is abandoned and they are hungry.

Globalize Struggle!
Globalize Hope!

Signed: