Hold-up sur l’alimentation
Comment les sociétés transnationales contrôlent l’alimentation du monde, font main basse sur les terres et détraquent le climat

[The Great Food Robbery: How Corporations Control Food, Grab Land and Destroy the Climate]
GRAIN

This book a collection of articles produced by GRAIN in recent years. It emphasizes agribusiness’ preponderant share of the responsibility for the climate crisis as well as the financial sector’s promotion of the land grab, enabling it to make money from people’s poverty. It also explains why the struggle for food sovereignty challenges these tendencies, identifying the stakeholders and presenting possible alternatives.

“For 20 years, GRAIN has fuelled anti-corporate campaigns with its groundbreaking research and biting analysis. Today, GRAIN is on the leading edge of the fight against land grabbing, powered by its signature political clarity and deep roots in the social movements on the front lines. A must read.”
Naomi Klein, Author of The Shock Doctrine

“This is vital reading for anybody interested in understanding the links between the climate, energy, financial and food crises - and how the questions of control over resources and power must be addressed if we want real solutions.”
Prof. Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food

“We now live in a permanent war between peasant agriculture, which is still feeding most people on earth, and corporate agribusiness which is taking control over territories, seeds, water and local knowledge. This book is a tool to help us regain control and choose our own food system.”
Henry Saragih, General Coordinator of the international farmers movement La Via Campesina and Secretary general of the Indonesian Peasant Union (SPI)


Available in Spanish, French and English
French version can be ordered of CETIM.

Looking back over these last months, three words can summarize the CETIM’s activities: denunciation, action and victory!

Guatemala was a target country for the CETIM, and last September we received a delegation of representatives from the communities and municipalities of San Andrés and La Libertad from the Department of Petén in Guatemala. These communities are victims of serious violations of their basic rights committed by the Perenco oil company, with the complicity and protection of local and national authorities. In collaboration with other Swiss and international NGOs, we relayed their grievances to the United Nations human rights bodies and organized several events to make known their situation to the Swiss public.

Aware that the struggle against human rights violations committed by transnational corporations should be carried out on multiple fronts, given their ramifications at the international level and the role of financial milieu in their destructive activities, the CETIM, in collaboration with a group of Swiss associations and trade unions, organized a demonstration in Geneva to denounce financial speculation in food products. This issue of the bulletin presents the common call which was launched on that occasion.

Finally, our long standing commitment in support of the adoption by the United Nations of a declaration on the rights of peasants has paid off, and we entered a new and important phase in September. The Human Rights Council decided to set up a working group with a mandate to draft a new international instrument on peasants’ rights, recognizing the legitimacy of La Via Campesina’s demand and the study by its own expert body (Advisory Committee) on this matter. The road ahead is long and certainly strewn with obstacles, but this is nonetheless a substantial initial victory.
For a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants!

Since it was set up in 1970, the CETIM has published research results and analyses on, among other subjects, agriculture, the role of the small-scale peasant farming family and, most recently, food sovereignty and the land grab (regarding this, see the presentation of our two most recent books, on the last page). We have established close ties with many peasant organizations throughout the world, in particular with the international movement of peasant families, La Via Campesina (LVC). Its objective is to defend family agriculture and the principle of food sovereignty to allow not only the fulfillment of the right to food for all but also sustainable development, respectful of the environment and of human beings.

In keeping with this, since 2001, the CETIM has encouraged and supported the participation of delegates from LVC in the United Nations human rights bodies. It has advised and supported them in order to allow them to familiarize themselves with the United Nations mechanisms. This has afforded them the opportunity to make abundant contacts and to make known their grievances and demands. LVC has thus been able to prove that, even though the United Nations is a huge machine, it can be the forum and the relay point of progressive demands. The Advisory Committee, moreover, on two occasions, carried out consultations with member states and NGOs.

As we have already emphasized, with the setting up of this group, a great step forward has been made, but the process is not yet finished, and a crucial phase is beginning. Given the relatively large number of votes in regard to the resolution, and especially the power of the states concerned, and the abstentions, it is important and urgent to carry out an information and sensitizing campaign aimed at public opinion in these countries, especially among members of parliament. In so doing, they must realize that, North-South divide, least of all among peoples, considering that it is a matter of creating a protection tool for family producers faced with colossal and systematic human rights violations. It is also a matter of promoting participation in the discussion that will take place starting in 2013 within the working group so that all particular issues and different problems according to region, be taken into account in the final version of the future declaration.

Vote of the resolution 21/19

FOR: Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, China, Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Djibouti, Ecuador, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Thailand, Uganda and Uruguay.

AGAINST: Austria, Belgium, Czech Rep., Hungary, Italy, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania, Spain and United States of America.

ABSTENTIONS: Botswana, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Maldives, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, Qatar, Moldova, Saudi Arabia, Senegal and Switzerland.

The “Arab spring”: A Preliminary Assessment

Revolts or revolutions, the peoples uprisings that appeared in the Arab world in 2011 have overthrown and continue to defy the authoritarian regimes and their delegitimized autocrats. Movements of social, political and identity affirmation, borne aloft on the demands of freedom and equality, recognition and redistribution, they have swept aside the fiction of the “Arab exception” and opened wide the perspective of what is possible in the Maghreb and the Middle East. But for what transitions, toward what horizons? Destabilization of the region, tensing of the actors, democratization of structures, recovery of aspirations, radicalization of opposition, explosion of conflicts, emancipation of peoples...? Beyond the characteristics all contemporary Arab societies have in common, the scenarios vary from one country to another. Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia... they are all concerned, directly or indirectly, by the episodes that are more or less repressive, more or less bloody. What initial broad assessments can be made of these uprisings? What promises do they contain, and what risks are there for their results? Laying out of the genesis of the “Arab spring”, of its local, national and international socio-political actors, of its cultural, demographic and economic factors, as well as the roles played by Europe and the United States, all helps to interpret a reality particularly complex and, further, to evaluate the liberating potential of the dynamics of social change and self-determination.

Le “printemps arabe”: un premier bilan

Available only in French.


WHO ARE WE?

Through its publications and its work with the UN, the CETIM denounces the maldevelopment in general, ecological as much as economic and social, and promotes an exchange of critical views from both Southern and Northern societies. The CETIM is focused in particular on respect for, implementation and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, as well as issues related to the right to development.
WHICH IMPUNITY IN GUATEMALA?

Along with the indigenous and peasant organizations of the South, the CETIM has been struggling for more than 40 years to denounce the violence that they are subjected to and the impunity of their aggressors. Each year, the CETIM receives some dozen militants whom it hears out and counsels. As far as possible, it organizes conferences, films, meetings with the press and written and oral statements within the framework of the United Nations human rights mechanisms. The CETIM also coordinates encounters between United Nations experts and activists.

Last September, within the framework of a European tour through Switzerland and France organized by the Collectif Guatemala France, the CETIM played host to a delegation including Hilda Ventura and Mario Ramos, representatives of the communities San Andrés and La Libertad (from the Department of Petén), and supported the lawyer, Ramón Cadena, the Latin America director of the International Commission of Jurists-ICJ.

These two indigenous representatives came to testify to the catastrophic situation that the San Andrés and La Libertad communities are living in: they simultaneously victims of extractive activities by the Perenco oil company, forced displacement, militarization and mega tourist projects.

To make known their situation, for lack of recognition at the national level, and to force the Guatemalan government to recognize their rights and to dialogue with the communities, the CETIM and Collectif Guatemala France, in partnership with the International Commission of Jurists-ICJ, Peace Watch Suisse, Km207, Communauté genevoise d’action syndicale-CGAS, International Network of Human Rights-RIDH and Filmar en América Latina organized two public conferences in the context of the U.N. Human Rights Council and in the City of Geneva (with the support of the Geneva Federation for Cooperation and Development-FGC), Gregory Lassalle’s film, “Des dérives de l’art aux dérives du pétrole”1, which presents the situation of these communities, was shown.

The CETIM gave the floor to Mario Ramos and Ramón Cadena during the time devoted to oral statements. These declarations are available on the CETIM internet site.2

From the Perenco Case to the Criminal Responsibility of the Corporations and their Affiliates in Guatemala

Guatemala’s economy is primarily based on exports, derived from intensive exploitation of its natural resources (mineral ore, petroleum, water, forests and land) and the monoculture of African palms (for agrofuels) and teak. Encouraged by the Guatemalan government, private national and transnational corporations play a leading role.

The Franco-British oil company Perenco has been present in Guatemala since 2001, the year when its subsidiary Perenco Guatemala Ltd bought the Xan wells originally developed by Basic Resources (present in Guatemala since 1985). These wells represent 90% of Guatemala’s oil production and are mostly in the Department of Petén.

The presence of Perenco in the country has been particularly denounced since the renewal of its contract in 2010 by president Álvaro Colom. He guaranteed the continued exploitation of the wells for another 15 years and expansion of the concession even though since 1989 it has been located in a protected national area, the Laguna del Tigre national park, the largest wetland area of Central America, protected for this reason by international conventions.

In spite of irregularities and the opposition of a majority of the Petén communities, the new contract has not been canceled. The Constitutional Court, to which the ICJ took the case, refused to hear it.

Perenco is continuing its pumping in this protected area while cases of water and soil pollution have been denounced. The Perenco Company can drill and pump its oil wells even to clean water. As the area is a protected zone, it is prohibited to dig wells and to own property, yet the Perenco Company can drill and pump its oil wells and the drug running families have title to their property.

To protect the Perenco oil wells and impose the tourism projects and monopolies on the communities, the government has remilitarized the region (under the pretext of fighting drug trafficking with Mexico) in violation of the 1996 peace accords. The San Andrés community is encircled by military checkpoints. The communities are completely abandoned by the government and constantly under threat of forced displacement.

In spite of major demonstrations in 2010 in Guatemala City, the situation of these communities is getting progressively worse. In 2011, two indigenous leaders were murdered. Ramon Cadena strongly denounced the total impunity of those responsible for these crimes. These communities wanted to bring their situation to the attention of the outside world.

The visit to Geneva allowed Hilda Ventura and Mario Ramos to report on their communities’ situation and to force their government to assume its responsibilities in terms of protection of its population and their access to economic and social rights. It is important to bring to light all the excesses committed in the County of Petén and to guarantee to the communities access to justice as well as the protection of their rights. Hilda Ventura and Mario Ramos, who met with officials from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights during their stay, requested from the United Nations agency an active follow-up on their situation.

The CETIM is following this case and is in contact with the members of the delegation.

Communities caught in a vice

Petén is the biggest county of Guatemala (one third of its territory). In the last century there were several waves of internal immigration into this area. The intensification of the domestic armed conflict (1960-1996) and poverty drove many families to settle there to flee the massacres. Hilda Ventura and Mario Ramos are among those whose families arrived without resources, encouraged by the government to settle in Petén and farm its land.

Today, these communities are caught in the crossfire between Perenco’s oil wells, drug running families and the Guatemalan government, which wants to develop tourism projects (on Mayan sites), several dam projects on the Usumacinta River and mega-plantations of African palm and teak. Hilda Ventura and Mario Ramos, in their presentations, showed how precarious life is in these communities. They have no access to education, nor to health care, nor even to clean water. As the area is a protected zone, it is prohibited to dig wells and to own property, yet the Perenco Company can drill and pump its oil wells and the drug running families have title to their property.

If you would like to know more about our conferences or publications, you can either visit our website www.cetim.ch, follow us on Facebook, or contact us by email at contact@cetim.ch to join our mailing list.

This film, which we recommend, is available for sale. It can be ordered from the Collectif Guatemala, 21ter, rue Voltaire, 75011 Paris, France, or by e-mail: collectifguatemala@gmail.com

These statements are in Spanish and are available at: http://www.cetim.ch/en/interventions_onu.php

This article is based on the presentations of the various members of the delegation at two conferences as well as on the report: “Perenco: exploiter le pétrole coûte que coûte. Rapport sur les conséquences sociales et environnementales des activités de l’entreprise Perenco Guatemala Limited”, published by the Collectif Guatemala, October 2011.

http://www.collectifguatemala.org/

Together for Social Justice and Human Rights

So, you would like to become more involved in CETIM’s activities? Nothing could be simpler. You can support CETIM in various different ways:

- as a member of our organisation. Your membership does not only represent a significant financial contribution, it also sends out a strong message to others in terms of maintaining and spreading our actions with regard to the promoting of human rights.
- as a volunteer. We regularly need help with preparing our bulletin and other publications for mailing and distribution; we need translators and interpreters (French, English, Spanish) to help at conferences; we also need volunteers for proofreading different kinds of documents and helping with maintaining our archive.
- by making a donation or a bequest. It is possible to make a donation at any time, either in support of CETIM’s actions in general, or to support a specific area of action. CETIM is recognized as a non-profit-making organisation in the public interest. All donations and bequests which it receives are tax-deductible for residents in Switzerland.
- by becoming an intern. For those who are looking for work experience in the field of human rights, or for activists in social movements wishing to increase their understanding of the workings of human rights bodies within the United Nations, we do accept interns. The internship periods coincide with the sessions of the U.N. Human Rights Council (March-April, June and September) and those of the Advisory Committee (February and August).
- by taking part in the conferences, debates and campaigns that we organise, or by publishing them in your own organisations.
- by buying or distributing our books.

SUPPORT THE CETIM!
This electronic critical report was produced in collaboration with Francine Mestrum, Ph.D. in social sciences and coordinator of Global Social Justice. This association is currently working on a plan for universal social protection based on the protection needs of everybody everywhere in the world and on the necessity of breaking down the neo-liberal wall and preparing a systematic change (www.globalsocialjustice.eu).

This publication is available for free in French, English and Spanish on our website: http://www.cetim.ch/en/publications_cahiers.php

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This bulletin is also available in French and in Spanish

You will find below the press release that we published jointly with Uniterre (a member of LVC) and La Via Campesina, following the vote on Human Rights Council resolution.

Stop the Complicity of the Swiss Financial in Food Speculation!

In Switzerland and especially in Geneva, a significant portion of financial speculation in agricultural products and food stuffs is carried on (30% of the world market), which contributes to the aggravation of the precariousness of the peoples in particular. This is the worst form of financial speculation because it endangers the lives of millions of persons. The peasants of the two hemispheres are the direct victims of it, for they do not benefit from any increases in price. These increases fill the pockets of intermediaries who have never seen or handled a grain of wheat or rice but who make fat profits from multiple (up to 30) virtual exchanges. Some 30 transnational corporations have taken control of almost the entire world’s commercial production: controlling stocks, fertilizers, seeds, pesticides, fodder, agricultural machinery, animal and vegetable genetics, veterinary products... The small-scale farmers are hostages of this system.

In Switzerland, we owe it to ourselves to act, for a major part of this market is handled here: • by denouncing the presence of international summits held on our territory; • by signing the federal popular initiative “Stop the Speculation” launched recently by the Swiss Socialist Youth (Jeunesse socialiste suisse), supported by various political parties, peasant organizations and NGOs; • by confronting our pension funds about the investments that they make. To denounce the 10th GLOBAL GRAIN Geneva (13-15 November), the CETIM and a dozen Swiss organizations and trade unions, organized a demonstration on 13 November in Geneva.