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We grieve the loss of innocent lives in the carnage of September 11. We also mourn the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding in Afghanistan.

The Bush administration has launched a war against terrorism, but its victim is the hungry population of Afghanistan, one of the poorest, most ravaged, war-torn countries in the world. According to the World Food Program, 70 percent of the population is malnourished and 7.5 million Afghans face starvation this winter. Nearly 20 percent of those in need are children under the age of five. Some 25 percent of all children die before the age of five. As many as 100,000 Afghan children could die this winter unless food reaches them in sufficient quantities over the next six weeks. An estimated 50,000 tons of food a month are needed to feed the millions on the brink of starvation.

Soon after the strikes began, the United Nations halted convoys of food to Afghanistan. Most of the foreign aid workers left the county and local food distribution networks have been disrupted as people flee the bombing. Lack of international humanitarian access, irregular delivery of international aid to those in need, and closing of international borders has hastened the deterioration of the crisis.

The US military answer to this crisis has been yellow ration packs dropped from transport planes into regions in which hungry people are believed to live. All aid packets are identical and equipped to feed adults only. Each pack contains around 2,200 calories—roughly enough to sustain one person for one day. More than 7.5 million Afghan people are starving. Clearly much more needs to be done to avoid a major human disaster. The US operation has almost no effect on the immediate welfare of the Afghani people, and will not affect the problem of chronic hunger in Afghanistan in any way.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Photo credit: Peter Rosset

Cuban President Fidel Castro told the delegates that "granting patents on food crops and medicines to just a few companies should be prohibited on moral grounds."

WORLD FORUM ON FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN HAVANA

From September 3–7 of this year, more than four hundred representatives of farmer, fisher, and nongovernmental organizations representing 60 countries met in Havana, Cuba. Their aim was to develop common positions for the upcoming "World Food Summit—Five Years Later" conference to be hosted by the UN in Italy next June.

At the core of civil society's concerns was the failure of the world's governments to make any effort or progress toward meeting the rather pathetic goal agreed to at the 1996 summit—to reduce the number of hungry people in the world by half by no later than 2015. The delegates placed the blame for this failure on trade liberalization under the World Trade Organization, the pro-business and budget-slashing policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and market-based and "technological fix" approaches—such as the promotion of genetically modified crops. Similarly, the patenting of life was addressed as encouraging excessive corporate control over our food system.

Economic, agricultural, fishing and trade policies imposed by the World Bank, IMF, and WTO, and promoted by transnational corporations, have widened the gap between wealthy and poor countries and accentuated the unequal distribution of earnings within countries. They have worsened the conditions of food production and access to healthy and sufficient nutrition for the majority of the world's peoples, even in the so-called developed countries. As a consequence, the most basic human right of all, the right to food and nutritional well-being as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is not guaranteed to the majority of the world's peoples.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

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SISTER INSTITUTE

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FOOD FIRST empowers citizens to address the root causes of hunger, poverty, and environmental decline. Our research and educational materials reveal how anti-democratic institutions and belief systems promote hunger and environmental destruction.

Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy urges the US government and the international community to be mindful of the following to prevent the deaths of innocent victims:

- The tragedy of September 11 should not turn America from its moral principles. This nation is rooted in the values of democracy, justice, and human rights and we need to be mindful of the principles of international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population which is currently under attack.
- International task forces should be set up to devise measures to ensure immediate and effective food security for war ravaged Afghanistan.
- The international community, including the countries in the region, should support humanitarian relief efforts by providing safe international humanitarian access to all populations in need and by ensuring the safety and security of international and national relief personnel.
- Neighboring countries should open their borders to all those who deserve protection and humanitarian assistance. International support should be provided to states offering asylum.
- The United States needs to ensure better domestic security without sacrificing civil liberties which are under attack by the Uniting and Strengthening America (USA) Act, Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), Patriot Act, and many other bills that are being proposed.
- International cooperation to end terrorism is a must, without giving covert operations freedom to act illegally.
- US should support efforts for an International Criminal Court to try individuals and terrorist groups and governments responsible for crimes against humanity.
- All governments, including ours, should act in ways that promote freedom, democracy and human rights for all. Foreign policy should be based on these same principles that we desire for ourselves in the US.

As a social justice group, Food First continues to be a passionate defender of liberty and freedom from hunger for all. We recommit ourselves to working to build a world based on the foundation of human rights. This is an opportunity to forge a broader international coalition—bringing disparate nations together in determination to fight against all crimes against humanity, all violations of the rights of other human beings. This is the only way to heal and end this cycle of mindless acts of violence.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The concept of "food sovereignty," as supported by the Forum, elevates control over, and the structure of, a nation's food system to the level of national security. According to the final declaration, this move would exempt food systems from the WTO, affirming "peoples' rights to define their own policies and strategies for the sustainable production, distribution, and consumption of food that guarantee the right to food for the entire population." (The full text of the declaration is available on-line at www.foodfirst.org/media/news/2001/havanadeclaration.html).



Born in Cuba to Chinese parents, Moises Sio Wong (left) is a veteran of the revolution and a retired brigadier general from the Cuban Armed Forces. He now spends his time promoting urban agriculture in Havana. Food First co-director Peter Rosset is on the right.

Food First co-director Peter Rosset addressed the plenary on the topic of true land reform, a key piece in the alternatives puzzle, and Cuba's recent success in overcoming the food crisis induced by the collapse of the Socialist Bloc. By emphasizing self-reliance, organic farming, and urban agriculture, Cuba is seen as providing important lessons for other countries.

REFLECTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS: WHAT YOUR SUPPORT OF FOOD FIRST MEANS

We couldn't do our important work without the support of you and our other 10,000 member donors. Your tax-deductible gifts provide half of our funding, allowing Food First to adhere to our core principles, no matter the dictates of current political fashions. You know you can count on us for uncompromising analysis and continued dedication to ensure the human right to feed oneself.

We are together in this struggle. While ending hunger is no easy task, we are given hope by the fact that in today's world there is more than enough for everyone—it is only human will that needs to be built. We are gratified to count you among our supporters and confident that our present and future work will inspire your continued support.

Here are a few highlights of what your support underwrites:

- Our campaign for economic and social human rights in the US and around the world brings together activist organizations working on human rights of the homeless, hunger, welfare reform, and worker's rights; and provides a common platform to work on.
- Our David versus Goliath media effort uses carefully researched facts to counter the multi-million dollar biotechnology industry public relations campaign in the corporate media. We are constantly present, on

the radio and television, and in the newspapers, providing a voice of reason. Our argument is simple and bolstered by the evidence: since there is more than enough food already produced, there is no urgent need to have genetically engineered foods in our diets or modified organisms in our ecosystems. We have time to seriously evaluate risks and focus on the alternatives.

- We support the struggle of ordinary people everywhere—the working poor, farmers, the landless, and the middle class—who are being hurt by runaway free trade policies being imposed by the American government through the WTO, World Bank, IMF, NAFTA and the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas. Our research clearly shows how giant corporations benefit at the expense of people's wages, job security, access to productive resources and living standards. People in both Northern and Southern countries are hurt by these trade policies. Our work provides the concrete basis for the global coalition we have been so active in helping to build.
- Our research and documentation of alternatives within our global food system has clearly shown that a better world is possible. We have proven that small farms are more efficient than large farms; and that ecologically-based farming methods are more productive and safer than genetically engineered seeds. True land reform can be

a key step toward inclusive, broad-based development, and local food production and urban agriculture provide greater food security than corporate food chains. Greater self-reliance and what global farmers' networks like the Via Campesina call "food sovereignty" offer more hope of feeding everyone than do free trade policies and the food dependency they perpetuate.

- Our presence in key forums, whether meetings of the WTO, World Bank and IMF or the upcoming World Food Summit 'Plus Five,' voicing our common positions in favor of a world of human dignity and human rights, and building the coalitions needed to bring real change.

Here at Food First our lives are immersed in peoples' movements. We are a key source for the critical analysis needed to move forward. The time is ripe for change. People are willing to make their voices heard all around the world. While we do not have the financial resources of the corporate sector, what we do have is the will of millions who want to place people before profits. Your continuing support is an investment in the future of our planet. Our vision is of a world where one day no one will go hungry.

Anuadra Mittal



Get Involved—What You Can Do

- ❖ Sign up for Food Rights Watch at www.foodfirst.org. Here you will find opportunities to make your voice heard.
- ❖ Forward *Food Rights Watch* to friends.
- ❖ Let us know when there might be opportunities in a particular media outlet for Food First to put forward our position on economic and social human rights, family farming, world trade, and genetically modified foods.
- ❖ Join with others in your local community in educating yourselves about these issues.
- ❖ Continue your support of Food First's work to educate and organize.

Thanks for caring. By working together we are moving closer to our goal of a world where everyone has the right to feed themselves.

World Trade Organization and Its Next Ministerial

WTO director general Michael Moore was hoping that the next WTO meeting in Doha, Qatar will be spared anti-globalization protests seen in Seattle, thanks to the restricted granting of visas. After several weeks of speculation following the tragic events of September 11 and then America's attack on Afghanistan, the WTO is meeting in Doha with a very limited participation by the civil society.

One of the greatest myths about globalization that is propagated by the corporations, governments, and media of the North is that it will benefit the world's poor. Food First has been working with international civil society to support the World Forum of Fisher Peoples to directly articulate their own opposition to economic globalization.

Without a strong presence by groups representing Southern peoples in Doha, the opposition to WTO will again be miscast and the concerns of Third World livelihoods will go unnoticed. To challenge that, Food First is supporting the Global Fisheries strike on November 21, 2001. Twenty-two organizations from 16 countries are participating in this strike to protest the open door policies of the WTO which marginalize fisher people in Asia and Africa. Food First will continue to work to ensure participation of communities affected by economic globalization in the decisionmaking processes that most affect their lives.

NEW STAFF AT FOOD FIRST

Food First welcomes new staff members, Michael Manoochehri, Internet Coordinator, and Sosamma Samuel-Burnett, Coordinator for the Social and Economic Human Rights Program. Michael received his B.S. in Plant Biology from the College of Natural Resources at UC Berkeley, and has worked on various Web and video media projects with the Public Education Network. Michael is also the founder and webmaster of FreeIPX, a Web site that monitors corporate intellectual property abuse. His interests include the free software movement, film and video media, computer programming, and being vegan.

Sosamma comes to Food First with extensive legal and advocacy training and experience in human rights, civil rights and public policy. Prior to moving to Food First, she advocated on behalf of indigenous populations, people of color, low income communities, and southern farmers through international human rights organizations, policy institutes, and law firms in Tupelo, Mississippi, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Washington, DC.

Jeff Perlstein, our former Coordinator for the Social and Economic Human Rights Program, has accepted a position with Media Alliance as its new Executive Director. Jeff was responsible for making the Economic Human Rights Bus Tour in California a success. We miss his abilities as an organizer, and also as a colleague, but look forward to working with him on different projects in the future.

TO JOIN FOOD FIRST

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