

# Hunger - a gnawing shame

Report from *World Food Summit: five years' later*

by Patrick Mulvany, ITDG



At the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) World Food Summit in November 1996, Fidel Castro railed against the rich countries of the world, which spent more than \$700 billion a year on weapons and not enough on satisfying people's need for food. He called the Summit's commitments to halve world hunger to 400m by 2015 "shameful... if only for their modesty" in that they still accepted hunger in a world of plenty. In June 2002, his spokesperson, the Cuban Foreign Minister, Sr. D. Felipe Pérez Roque, at the *World Food Summit: five years' later* said: "That there are, today, still 815m hungry people in the world is truly a crime. That the proposals we made nearly six years ago are now even further from being achieved is [even more] shameful."

There has indeed been no progress in reducing hunger, except perhaps in China. Worse, in Rome, in May 2002, 20 leaders of the world's most powerful countries met at the NATO-Russia summit and agreed effectively to sustain the now \$800 billion a year global armaments industry, with no reference to the need to balance this with increased resources for the poor and hungry.

Five and a half weeks after the NATO summit all but one of these leaders boycotted the *World Food Summit: five years' later* held at FAO's headquarters in Rome, condemning the world's hungry to further misery and offering no long-term solutions to the causes underlying the famine currently affecting 20m people in Africa. And the one leader who came, Italy's Premier, Silvio Berlusconi, as Chair of the Conference he terminated the final session two hours early so he could watch the football! As the French newspaper Liberation said: "FAO was caught playing 'off side'!"

Apart from Berlusconi, the only common link between the two Summits was the military operation of 16,000 police, carabinieri and soldiers put in place to contain the politicians and exclude the people. Many people from Civil Society were unable to enter the exclusion zone of half a kilometre around the building, which kept away the 30,000 person "March for Food Sovereignty: land and dignity" organised by Italian social movements with the Civil Society **Forum for Food Sovereignty** at the start of the Summit. But some intended participants could not even enter the country, because of increased visa problems. FAO became a military zone. And this emphasised the sense of oppression in the Summit.

The US say they left the Food Summit happy: they had achieved acceptance of the term 'biotechnology' in the final declaration, with no reference to biosafety, the Cartagena Protocol or the Precautionary Principle; had deleted any reference to an international legally-binding Code of Conduct on the Right to Food; and had watered down the call to ratify the new International Seed Treaty (ITPGRFA) to something for countries "to consider".

In meetings with delegations, side events, in private sector meetings, and in a seminar co-hosted with the disingenuous Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the US forced a cloak of respectability on its assertion that GMOs were the solution to world hunger. This state-sponsored public relations and opinion forming onslaught on behalf of biotech transnational corporations will continue with further heavy promotion of these ideas at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in August, and, early next year, the US government will host a ministerial-level International Conference on Agricultural Science and Technology.

The final Declaration of the formal Summit "The International Alliance against Hunger" (<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/MEETING/004/Y6948E.HTM>) restates the same old recipe now spiked with biotechnology and with pious words about how governments must deal with the 'lack of political will' to solve hunger. It does not propose any new legally-binding measures, nor does it commit the rich to paying more to help the poor.

Civil Society, including farmers' organisations, rejected this Declaration and noted that it was not a 'lack of political will' but '**too much political will**' to establish a global hegemony for trade liberalisation, industrial agriculture, genetic engineering and military dominance that are the main causes of hunger.

In the 600 person Civil Society Forum for Food Sovereignty, built up through regional processes during the past 18 months with participation from, mainly Southern, indigenous peoples and women and men farmers, forest dwellers, livestock keepers, fisherfolk, workers and NGOs, we developed our final declaration "**Food Sovereignty: an Action Agenda**".

The political statement emphasises four points:

- **Trade** - getting agriculture out of the WTO and an end to 'dumping' of food;
- **Genetic Resources** - rejection of GMOs and Patents on Life and qualified support for the International Seed Treaty (ITPGRFA) and its development to cover other genetic resources for food and agriculture;
- **Agroecology** - 'mainstreaming' a different approach to agriculture through locally-controlled, small-scale agroecological production; and
- implementing an international, legally-binding **Right to Food**.

The Action Agenda is backed by many specific recommendations. It covers more issues than these four headlines. For example on Access to Resources, water, land and aquatic resources are included as well as genetic resources.

These recommendations will guide civil society campaigns and our interaction with, especially, the Rome-based international development agencies - FAO, World Food Programme, International Fund for Agricultural Development, International Plant Genetic Resources Institute/CGIAR.

Genetic resources were particularly dominant in both the official Summit, because of the pressure from the US government to gain acceptance of GMOs and life patents and partly because the International Seed Treaty was promoted by the FAO DG, Jacques Diouf, at formal signing ceremonies - the Treaty ended up with 47 new signatures (total now 57) and 7 ratifications.

Genetic Resources and Community Rights were also prominent in the Civil Society Forum and side meetings, because of the threats of GMOs and genetic engineering and Intellectual Property Rights on genetic resources and genes. We were building on our long-standing campaigns for access, conservation, controls and regulation. This time, though, we widened the constituency to include pastoralists and fisherfolk, both now concerned by a similar agenda of privatisation of resources, contamination from GMOs and impacts of the global trade agenda on local production systems.

These issues are summarised in a background paper "**Sustaining Agricultural Biodiversity and the integrity and free flow of genetic resources for food and agriculture**" ([www.ukabc.org/accessgenres.pdf](http://www.ukabc.org/accessgenres.pdf)) which built on the conclusions of Civil Society Organisations at the sixth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Hague in April 2002, at which we prepared for this Summit (see [www.ukabc.org/cop6.htm](http://www.ukabc.org/cop6.htm)), and in the report of a Forum Workshop concerning access to genetic resources.

The recommendations from the access to genetic resources workshop "**Seeds, Breeds and People: the fight for genetic resources**" include:

- increasing the conservation and sustainable use of all genetic resources for food and agriculture (crop, forest, livestock, fish, microbial and their 'wild' relatives), and of a wide diversity of species and agroecosystems;
- ensuring equitable distribution of benefits from their use;
- rejecting of the use of genetic engineering technologies for plants, livestock and fish;
- implementing a moratorium on the release of GMOs into the environment and a ban on their release in Centres of Origin and Diversity of the world's food security crops;
- banning Terminator technologies and other genetic use restriction technologies (GURTs);
- banning Patents on Life and a guarantee of access to all genetic resources for food and agriculture;
- Urging governments to ratify and bring the International Seed Treaty into force so that international realisation of Farmers' Rights can be established and prohibition of patents on life can be strengthened; and
- insisting that proposals to develop a 'Global Conservation Trust' should include full participation of farmers' organisations and be under the rules and policies, and with direct involvement of the Governing Body, of the International Seed Treaty.

(Details at: [www.ukabc.org/wfs5+.htm](http://www.ukabc.org/wfs5+.htm))

The Civil Society Forum and its interventions in the Summit Plenary, a Multi Stakeholder Dialogue and formal meetings with, for example, the Secretariat of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture took the moral high ground. But in the official Summit the only echoes were almost uniquely from Cuba and Norway, the latter declaring their support for a Code of Conduct on the Right to Food and the need "to emphasize the significance of Farmers' Rights".

But the Summit gave no succour to the hungry. As Pat Mooney of the ETC Group (formerly RAFI) noted in the final plenary of the Forum for Food Sovereignty - we should have no more food summits. The 1974 World Food Conference agreed to abolish hunger in 10 years. The 1996 World Food Summit committed to halving the number of malnourished people in 20 years. What would the next agree to?

It is our Global Shame that nearly a quarter of the world's population goes to bed hungry in a world that has never before produced so much food. This is annoying for the rich but tragic for the poor. The sad reflection on the formal Summit is that governments will do little to eradicate hunger and corporations will continue to be allowed to extend their control over who gets to eat. And there is little profit in providing for the poor.

Civil Society Organisations and Social Movements are, as ever, the last bastions against the gnawing pangs of hunger. But through the process of the Forum for Food Sovereignty we have strengthened our legitimacy, commitment and capacity. There is a glimmer of hope.

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