

2011 Nyeleni Declaration on Land Grabbing

Conference Declaration: Stop Land-Grabbing Now!

We, women and men peasants, pastoralists, indigenous peoples and their allies, who gathered together in Nyeleni from 17-19 November 2011, have come from across the world for the first time to share with each other our experiences and struggles against land-grabbing. One year ago we supported the Kolongo Appeal from peasant organizations in Mali, who have taken the lead in organising local resistance to the take-over of peasants' lands in Africa. Now we came to Nyeleni in response to the Dakar Appeal, which calls for a global alliance against land-grabbing. For we are determined to defend food sovereignty, the commons and the rights of small scale food providers to natural resources.

In Mali, the Government has committed to give away 800 thousand hectares of land to business investors. These are lands of communities that have belonged to them for generations, even centuries, while the Malian State has only existed since the 1960-s. This situation is mirrored in many other countries where customary rights are not recognised. Taking away the lands of communities is a violation of both their customary and historical rights.

Secure access to and control over land and natural resources are inextricably linked to the enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and several regional and international human rights treaties, such as the rights to self-determination, an adequate standard of living, housing, food, health, culture, property and participation. We note with grave concern that states are not meeting their obligations in this regard and putting the interests of business interests above the rights of peoples.

Land-grabbing is a global phenomenon led by local, national and transnational elites and investors, and governments with the aim of controlling the world's most precious resources. The global financial, food and climate crises have triggered a rush among investors and wealthy governments to acquire and capture land and natural resources, since these are the only "safe havens" left that guarantee secure financial returns. Pension and other investment funds have become powerful actors in land-grabbing, while wars continue to be waged to seize control over natural wealth. The World Bank and regional development banks are facilitating land and water grabs by promoting corporate-friendly policies and laws, facilitating capital and guarantees for corporate investors, and fostering an extractive, destructive economic development model. The World Bank, IFAD, FAO and UNCTAD have proposed seven principles that legitimise farmland grabbing by corporate and state investors. Led by some of the world's largest transnational corporations, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) aims to transform peasant agriculture into industrial agriculture and integrate smallholder farmers to global value chains, greatly increasing their vulnerability to land-loss.

Land-grabbing goes beyond traditional North-South imperialist structures; transnational corporations can be based in the United States, Europe, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea, among others. It is also a crisis in both rural and urban areas. Land is being grabbed in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe for industrial agriculture, forest plantations, mining, infrastructure projects, dams, tourism, conservation parks, industry, urban expansion and military purposes. Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities are being expelled from their territories by armed forces, increasing their vulnerability and in some cases even leading to slavery. Market based, false solutions to climate change are creating more ways to alienate local communities from their lands and natural resources.

Despite the fact that women produce most of the world's food, and are responsible for family and community well being, existing patriarchal structures continue to dispossess women from the lands that they cultivate and their rights to resources. Since most peasant women do not have secure, legally recognised land rights, they are particularly vulnerable to evictions.

The fight against land-grabbing is a fight against capitalism, neoliberalism and a destructive economic model. Through testimonies from our sisters and brothers in Brazil, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea Bissau, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Thailand and Uganda, we learned how land-grabbing threatens small scale, family based farming, nature, the environment and food sovereignty. Land grabbing displaces and dislocates communities, destroys local economies and the social-cultural fabric, and jeopardizes the identities of communities, be they farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, workers, dalits or indigenous peoples. Those who stand up for their rights are beaten, jailed and killed. There is no way to mitigate the impacts of this economic model and the power structures that promote it. Our lands are not for sale or lease.

But we are not defeated. Through organisation, mobilisation and community cohesiveness, we have been able to stop land-grabbing in many places. Furthermore, our societies are recognising that small-scale, family based agriculture and food production is the most socially, economically and environmentally sustainable model of using resources and ensuring the right to food for all.

Recalling the Dakar Appeal, we reiterate our commitment to resist land-grabbing by all means possible, to support all those who fight land-grabs, and to put pressure on national governments and international institutions to fulfill their obligations to ensure and uphold the rights of peoples. Specifically, we commit to:

Organise rural and urban communities against land-grabs in every form.

Strengthen the capacities of our communities and movements to reclaim and defend our rights, lands and resources.

Win and secure the rights of women in our communities to land and natural resources.

Create public awareness about how land grabbing is creating crises for all society.

Build alliances across different sectors, constituencies, regions, and mobilise our societies to stop land-grabbing

Strengthen our movements to achieve and promote food sovereignty and genuine agrarian reform

In order to meet the above commitments, we will develop the following actions:

On capacity building for organising local resistance

- Report back to our communities the deliberations and commitments of this Conference.
- Build our own databases about land-grabbing by documenting cases, and gathering the needed information and evidence about processes, actors, impacts, etc.
- Ensure that our communities have the information they need about laws, rights, companies, contracts, etc., so that they can resist more effectively the business investors and governments who try to take their lands and natural resources.
- Set up early warning systems to alert communities to risks and threats.

- Strengthen our communities through political and technical training, and restore our pride in being food producers and providers particularly among the youth.
- Secure land and resource rights for women by conscientising our communities and movements about the importance of respecting and protecting women's land rights particularly in customary systems.
- Develop and use local media to organise members of our and other communities, and share with them information about land-grabbing.
- Make our leaders abide by the rules set by our communities and compel them to be accountable to us, and our communities and organisations.

On using legal aid for our defense

- Develop our own systems of legal aid and liaise with legal and human rights experts.
- Condemn all forms of violence and criminalisation of our struggles and our mobilizations in defense of our rights.
- Work for the immediate release of all those jailed as a result of their struggles for their lands and territories, and urgently develop campaigns of solidarity with all those facing conflicts.

On advocacy and mobilization

- Institutionalise April 17 as the day of global mobilisation against land-grabbing; also identify additional appropriate dates that can be used for such mobilisations to defend land and the commons.
- Develop our political arguments to expose and discredit the economic model that spurs land-grabbing, and the various actors and initiatives that promote and legitimise it.
- Establish a Peoples' Observatory on land-grabbing to facilitate and centralise data gathering, communications, planning actions, advocacy, research and analysis, etc.
- Promote women's land rights through targeted re-distribution of land for women, and other actions; make laws and policies responsive to the particular needs of women.
- Take our messages and demands to parliaments, governments and international institutions. Continue engaging with the Committee on World Food Security and demanding that processes such as the FAO Guidelines on Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forest truly contribute to protect and promote the rights to land and natural resources of small scale food providers.
- Identify and target local, national and international spaces for actions, mobilizations and building broad-based societal resistance to land-grabbing.
- Plan actions that target corporations, (including financial corporations), the World Bank and other multilateral development banks that benefit from, drive and promote land and natural resource grabs. Maintain opposition to schemes of corporate self-regulation such as RAI.
- Expand and strengthen our actions to achieve food sovereignty and agrarian reform, to promote the recognition of customary systems while ensuring the rights of women and to ensure the rights to land and natural resources of the youth.
- Support peoples' enclosures of their resources through land occupations, occupations of the offices of corporate investors, protests and other actions to reclaim their commons.
- Demand that our governments fulfill their human rights obligations, immediately stop land and natural resource transfers to business investors, cancel contracts already made, restitute the grabbed lands and protect rural and urban communities from ongoing and future land-grabs.

On alliance building

- Build strong organisational networks and alliances at various levels—local, regional and international—building on the Dakar Appeal and with small-scale food producers/providers at the centre of these alliances.
- Build alliances with members of pension schemes in order to prevent pension fund managers from investing in projects that result in land grabbing.
- Build strategic alliances with press and media, so that they report accurately our messages and realities; counter the prejudices spread by the mainstream media about the land struggles and land reform in Zimbabwe.

We call all organizations committed to these principles and actions to join our Global Alliance against Land-Grabbing, which we solemnly launch today here in Nyeleni.

Globalize the struggle! Globalize hope!

Nyeleni, November 19, 2011