

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

Thursday, April 16, 2009

U.S. WORKING GROUP ON THE FOOD CRISIS URGES G8 TO REJECT FAILED GREEN REVOLUTION POLICIES FOR AFRICA

“Business as Usual” Will Not Solve Global Hunger Crisis

Washington D.C. -- The U.S. Working Group on the Food Crisis, a group representing anti-hunger, family farm, community food security, environmental, international aid, labor, food justice, consumers and other food system actors, urges the G8 at the upcoming Agricultural Ministerial in Treviso, Italy to reject the failed policies of the Green Revolution. A recent landmark report backed by the UN and World Bank argues for agroecological and sustainable agriculture, rather than reliance on chemical-intensive practices and genetic engineering.

The U.S. Working Group is deeply disappointed by the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s hasty passage of the Global Food Security Act (S. 384) on March 31. This bill would mark a significant shift in U.S. policy by specifically mandating foreign agriculture research for genetic engineering. Previously, we had criticized the Committee’s March 24 hearing on “Alleviating Global Hunger” that relied on testimonies from “Green Revolution” advocates for the industrial agriculture system. We urge the G8 summit to resist pressure from the biotech industry and embrace genuine solutions to the food crisis.

The U.S. Working Group on the Food Crisis’s vision for reforming agriculture policy to help end the global food crisis calls on governments to:

- Re-regulate commodity futures markets to end excessive speculation
- Halt expansion of industrial agrofuels in developing countries
- Stabilize commodity prices through international and domestic food reserves
- Establish fairer regional and global trade arrangements
- Direct farm policy, research, education and investment toward agroecological farming practices.

The United States should reject the approach of the Global Food Security Act, sponsored by Senators Richard Lugar (R-IN) and Bob Casey (D-PA), and instead bring our agricultural research and foreign aid strategy in line with the findings of the acclaimed International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), backed by United Nations agencies, the World Bank and over 400 contributing scientists from 80 countries. **The IAASTD found that the most promising solutions to the world’s food crisis include investing in agroecological research, extension and farming.**

Marcia Ishii-Eiteman, Senior Scientist at Pesticide Action Network and a Lead Author of the IAASTD report said, “Today’s global food crisis demands immediate action. But the Lugar-Casey Global Hunger Bill takes us in exactly the wrong direction. As numerous scientific reports from the UN have confirmed, African productivity can be most effectively increased through investment in organic and agroecological farming.” Ishii-Eiteman further cautioned the G8 not to focus simply on production: “The bigger, more fundamental challenge today is about restoring fairness and democratic control over our food systems. It is about increasing the profitability, well-being and resilience of small-scale and family farmers in the face of massive environmental and global economic challenges.”

Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy has released a policy brief on “Why the Lugar-Casey Global Food Security Act Will Fail to Curb Hunger” (attached). Eric Holt-Gimenez, Executive Director of Food First, said, “The Global Food Security Act, while commendable for its renewed focus on investing in agricultural development in Africa, mandates funding for genetically modified (GM) crop research. Past public-private partnerships on GM crops for Africa have proven to be colossal failures. The failed GM sweet potato project between Monsanto, USAID and a Kenyan research institute is a good example of 14 years’ worth of wasted money and effort. The G8 Conference should focus on solutions that actually work.”

Anti-hunger groups also criticized the Global Food Security Act’s approach and warned about the effects of promoting biotechnology on the poor. Bill Ayres, Executive Director of World Hunger Year, said, “The recent Global Food Security Act to improve the U.S. response to the world food crisis starts from a flawed premise. Indeed, the world – and the U.S. in particular – must refocus antihunger efforts to support aid and agricultural research for small farmers throughout the world. But the emphasis on genetically modified crops is misplaced. We saw Germany this week ban genetically engineered maize based on health and environmental grounds. GM maize has also been banned in France and Greece. We should focus on helping African farmers maintain control over their land and seeds, earn a living wage, and enhance – not degrade – the quality of their land and water.”

Faith groups also recommended a new approach to eliminating global hunger and warned that the G8 should not emphasize biotechnology. Andrew Kang Bartlett of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) said, “While the intentions behind the Global Food Security Act may be laudable, the question is whether poorer farmers left behind by the last Green Revolution will again be swept aside by a top-down approach that benefits mostly transnational corporations.” Dave Kane, of Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, a Catholic missionary organization with priests, brothers, sisters and lay people working in Asia, Africa and Latin America, added, “We have found GM technology to be disastrous for small farmers and rural communities. Our missionaries in Latin America and Asia have seen farmers get deeper and deeper into debt as they struggle to pay for all the seeds, fertilizers and herbicides that GMO technologies require. The result: farmers lose their land and with it, the ability to feed themselves and their families.”

The National Family Farm Coalition, a North American member of La Via Campesina, the international peasants movement, will be pressing the G8 to reconsider policies that advocate for food sovereignty. Ben Burkett, a Mississippi farmer and president of NFFC said, “Farmers both

here and in Africa know that the current industrial agriculture model—and the push to fast-track trade liberalization—has failed to alleviate global hunger and denied family farmers a sustainable livelihood. A recently released report this month by Union of Concerned Scientists titled “Failure to Yield: Evaluating the Performance of Genetically Engineered Crops,” showed that despite 20 years of research and 13 years of commercialization, genetic engineering has failed to significantly increase U.S. crop yields while only driving up costs for farmers. In comparison, traditional breeding continues to deliver better results. The G8 needs to move away from Green Revolution monoculture practices and instead implement the IAASTD’s most promising options: support ecologically sound practices, more equitable trade rules and local food distribution systems to empower family farmers.”

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For more information, go to the US Food Crisis group’s website:
<http://www.usfoodcrisisgroup.org>

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