

**The Southeast Asian Council for Food Security and Fair Trade Declaration  
Cancun, Mexico  
WTO Fifth Ministerial Meeting 2003**

We, the members representing the Southeast Asian Council for Food Security and Fair Trade ( SEA Council ), a council represented by civil society organizations and farmers movement working actively in the nexus of food, trade and agriculture in the region of Southeast Asia hereby assert that the right to food is a basic and fundamental right of its people. People must have their independence and discretionary powers to unilaterally decide their own food needs. Food sovereignty ensures appropriate and culturally acceptable means to produce and provide adequate supply of food and upholds people's right to land, water and productive resources.

**WE ARE MINDFUL THAT**

- the right to food has been continually denied and is presently considered more of an item for trade rather than for sustenance
- poverty is increasing instead of decreasing in many region, especially in Southeast Asia with farming families being destabilized and pressured to change local agricultural practices
- the current dominant models of development driven by economic liberalization and corporate control reinforce social inequalities and undermine sovereignty of nations to protect its people
- the key role played by women in the food security of households, nutrition of children and in the food production of crops specifically their traditional knowledge in the conservation and management of biological diversity such as land, seeds and water are threatened . The current unfair trade regime has worsened the gender inequities and inequalities .
- local communities livelihood have been destroyed with the privatization of biological, land and water resources in addition to the patenting of living organisms with unfair appropriation of resources and knowledge. Privatization of this knowledge inhibits the free exchange of seed varieties amongst farmers, disrupting traditional practices that form the basis of on farm diversity and thus food security for the majority of the world's farmers.

**WE OBSERVE THAT**

- the WTO Agreements, specially the Agreement on Agriculture ( AOA ), the Agreement on Trade Related intellectual property Rights ( TRIPs ), Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures ( SPS ), Technical Barriers to Trade ( TBT ), Quantitative Restrictions, Subsidies and

countervailing measures and the General Agreement on Trade in Services are unfair agricultural related trade agreements thrust upon the developing and least developing nations.

- the loan conditions of IMF/ WB have forced developing countries to lower their trade barriers, cut subsidies for the domestic farmers and eliminate government programmes on rural agricultural development. The AOA allows developed countries to dump surplus foods at prices below the cost of production, driving out rural production and devastating rural livelihoods in developing countries but expanding the markets for large transnational companies

- the GATS seeks to ensure that a country's domestic regulations are the least burdensome to service providers that are predominantly US and European based transnational companies, thereby jeopardizing policies and regulatory systems designed to protect social development, labour and human rights, consumers, water resources and environmental integrity.

- intellectual property rights as applied to biodiversity and traditional knowledge are private and monopolistic and is incompatible with community rights. The SEA Council opposes to the patenting of lifeforms including crops and seeds as it removes the access and control of food production from local communities to transnational corporations

- genetic engineering in food and farming presents serious and irreversible environmental and health risks. Governments should have the right to use the precautionary principle and establish bans or moratoria on GMO crops.

## **WE CALL FOR**

- the total rejection of any attempt to launch negotiations on the Singapore issues ie of investment, competition policy , transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation as part of a "single undertaking " agreed in the Doha Development Round in 2001. Until such time when all members of WTO have the capacity to negotiate on an informed and equal basis, expanding the agenda through a new round would further disadvantage developing countries.

- the developed nations to live up to their commitments under the Uruguay Round to liberalise their markets to products from the developing nation. The developed nations of the North, especially the European Union and United States, must live up to the letter and spirit of the Uruguay Round, which they have not done so far. Moreover, liberalization in the North must not be accompanied by reciprocal concessions from the developing countries. Owing to their Special and Differential Status, the developing countries must have the discretion to decide whether or not to further liberalize their markets or even protect them for the common good.

- the fact that developing countries will not be able to compete with the developed nations, the developing nations must be able to institute or reinstitute tariffs and quotas to protect its subsistence food producing sector for a prescribed period of time in order to build the capacity of their small scale farmers, thereby ensuing farmers livelihoods and for food security reasons

- the elimination of all export subsidies and export credits and all forms of direct payments in the developed agro-exporting countries since these subsidies distort prices in the international market and promotes mounting surplus for exports in developing countries.

- all members of the WTO ,including the Southeast Asian member states to acknowledge the Convention on Biological Diversity and to ratify the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety Protocol as appropriate the forum concerning threats of genetically modified organisms (GMO)

to biodiversity, to health and to the environment.

- All governments including the Southeast Asian member states should reject the UPOV model of sui generis plant variety laws which inhibits farmers to save, use, sell and exchange seeds and instead support the FAO's International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture restricting intellectual property rights on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in the interests of long term food security and to prevent biopiracy.
- the South East Asian governments should implement policies that give adequate support for organic / ecological agricultural practices and production of food.
- the Southeast Asian governments to reject the commodification of water and the full cost recovery principle of the World Bank that will affect the poor, rural and urban communities.
- the South East Asian members states to enact legislations that favors procurements of food for national food security reserves and national nutrition programmes from local farmers production surpluses , guaranteeing reasonable prices that cover production costs.
- the South East Asian member states to strengthen mechanisms for buffer stock of staples within ASEAN and make intra-trade more complementary in order to unite interests of countries with "same" competing products .
- An International Convention that replaces the current AOA and other agro related agreements which implements within the international policy framework on the concept of food sovereignty and the basic human rights of all peoples to safe and healthy food.

### **The Principle of Subsidiarity**

The SEA Council supports the principles of subsidiarity, which says that if products can be produced at reasonable cost locally, they should be produced there instead of having them produced elsewhere owing to superficial and often flawed calculations of 'comparative advantage.' This will ensure the protection of local communities, the diversity of plant life and the environment. Using the criterion of narrow comparative advantage often results in net losses for society as a whole, resulting in tremendous social costs as massive displacement occurs. The principle of subsidiarity is of special significant to Southeast Asia, where at least half of the population still depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Indeed, in this region agriculture is not just a sector of production but a way of life.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Governments must acknowledge the primacy of human rights over trade rules. These rights are indicators of real development. Governments **MUST** take all food and agricultural concerns out of WTO through the dismantling of the agricultural related Agreements ( AOA, SPS, TRIPs , TBT, QRs, CM, Subsidies and GATs ) and commit themselves to abide to a World Convention on Food Sovereignty and Trade that promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of people to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable food production.

## **SEA COUNCIL COMMIT OURSELVES TO**

- Promote and advocate ecologically sustainable agriculture as key to food security in Southeast Asia.
- Strengthen our efforts and campaigns in ensuring food security and food sovereignty principles are in place in national governments policies in Southeast Asia
- Promote and advocate fair trade practices and alternative people-people agro-related strategies at national and regional level
- Demand for thorough review of Asean Free Trade Area Agreement ( AFTA ) with active citizen's participation at national and regional level and to draw up an ASEAN Food Charter embodying recommendations in ensuring people's food sovereignty.
- Encourage complementation of each ASEAN member country e.g. "South to South" cooperation on research, trading, production and information sharing.