

COMPREHENSIVE AGRICULTURAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Communication from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

The following communication, received on 19 June 2008, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

1. As part of the process aimed at ensuring social progress among the country's population, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela now provides agricultural producers with legal instruments that allow the development of productive forces and the implementation of revolutionary rural policies aimed at establishing a social order which unifies empowerment of the people and plant and animal production thanks to agricultural economic planning which is conducive to a state of social justice and wellbeing respectful of the environment, in which agri-food sovereignty enables the population to enjoy a nutritional, suitable, healthy and optimum diet, through systematic action designed to overcome economic and social discrepancies between rural and urban areas.

2. An analysis of the current animal, plant and human health situation in Venezuela shows the extensive damage caused by the use of agro-toxic substances over the last 40 years. Venezuela is sadly not only the Latin American country with the highest rates of teratogenic defects and congenital deformation but it is also affected by the following problems:

- (a) Acute problems such as dermatitis, loss of consciousness, convulsions and respiratory depression;
- (b) chronic problems such as neurological disorders, behavioural disorders, reproductive disorders, cancer, mutagenesis and disruption of the endocrine system, methaemoglobinaemia in children caused by excess nitrates and nitrites in water and food;
- (c) permanent or residual environmental damage to land, water and air due to excess nitrates and other substances;
- (d) permanent or residual damage to wild and domestic plant and animal species which has generated ecological imbalances.

3. Articles 127 and 305 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela stipulate protection of the environment and the practice of sustainable agriculture:

"Article 127: It is the right and duty of each generation to protect and maintain the environment for its own benefit and that of the world of the future. Everyone has the right, individually and collectively, to enjoy a safe, healthful and ecologically

balanced life and environment. The State shall protect the environment, biological and genetic diversity, ecological processes, national parks and natural monuments, and other areas of particular ecological importance."

4. The genome of a living being shall not be patentable, and the field shall be regulated by the law relating to the principles of bioethics. It is a fundamental duty of the State, with the active participation of society, to ensure that the population develops in a pollution-free environment in which air, water, soil, coasts, climate, the ozone layer and living species receive special protection, in accordance with the law.

5. Food sovereignty is considered to be "self-determination and independence of a nation based on social management of food production, storage, processing, distribution and consumption, the primary objective being to ensure that its population enjoys a healthy, balanced and adequate diet, with physical and economic access and equitable distribution, on the basis of citizen training, the comprehensive control of germplasm, access to natural tangible and intangible elements, and the appropriation of sustainable knowledge and technologies based on historical, social, cultural, political, economic and agro-ecological values and potential which protect nature".

6. We propose a new conceptual theoretical-philosophical framework which goes beyond the idea of merely ensuring the health of plants and animals, products and by-products and promotes a geocentric ancestral vision (*pacha mama*) according to which the quality of the soil, water and air and people's health are closely linked, under agro-ecological principles conducive to sustainability, sovereignty and citizen participation through the development of measures, rules and projects for the prevention, control and eradication of pests and diseases.

7. The projects that contribute to the achievement of these institutional and State objectives are as follows.

- (a) Promotion and implementation of the new comprehensive agricultural health system, which favours ownership and involvement of animal and plant producers through communal councils, farmers' councils and comprehensive animal and plant health councils in campaigns for the prevention, control and eradication of the main diseases and pests (foot-and-mouth disease, brucellosis and avian influenza), and integrated crop management;
- (b) development of a health sovereignty and defence system covering 19 international ports, 13 national and international airports and six border posts, as well as permanent surveillance by the National Guard;
- (c) building up and development of a national network of diagnostic and phytosanitary and zoosanitary biological resource production laboratories consisting of one national reference laboratory, two State reference laboratories, 12 communal phytosanitary and zoosanitary diagnostic laboratories, 17 biocontrol production laboratories, nine biofertilizer production laboratories and one high-security quarantine station for a total of 42 sites in 23 federal bodies, with a federal support service ensuring coverage of 78 per cent of national territory;
- (d) introduction of a national technical georeferencing platform to keep official information up to date so as to facilitate decision making and the adoption of preventive and/or prophylactic measures, and the direction of domestic policies which are centralized but devolved according to each region's social and biological features.

8. In view of the foregoing and on the strength of the arguments outlined above, we propose to this Committee and the world at large to move beyond the reductionist model of the green revolution and develop and promote the agro-ecological model of comprehensive agricultural health.
