

Report of the  
**Forum for Resistance to Agribusiness**  
Buenos Aires, 23 – 25 June 2006  
[www.resistalosagronegocios.info](http://www.resistalosagronegocios.info)

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The Forum for Resistance against the Agro-Industry took place in the City of Buenos Aires, Argentina on the 23, 24 and 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2006. Participants at the meeting included Peasant and Indigenous organisations, environmental groups, academics and urban social movements from Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and Ecuador.

This document provides a political summary of the Forum.

A detailed account of the discussions which took place within the Forum workshops can be found in a second document on the following website: [www.resistalosagronegocios.info](http://www.resistalosagronegocios.info)

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### 1. Objectives

The violence of the agribusiness model manifests itself daily: through the evictions of peasant communities, militarization of the countryside, selling of land to foreigners, appropriation of natural resources, state funding of projects which benefit the corporations and which increase the national debt (such as ports, waterways, telecommunications), consolidation of land expropriations, desertification, contamination by toxic agrochemicals and genetically modified organisms, the destruction of biodiversity, the rural exodus and the growth of the belts of misery around urban centres, the lack of employment, hunger and malnutrition, avoidable sickness and deaths, the colonisation of our cultures and loss of our food heritage, the domination by supermarkets over local markets and their control over prices and the contents of the basic food basket by the multinationals. All these consequences arise from a process being imposed on rural communities and which also reaches into and dominates urban society.

**The agribusiness model follows the criteria set out by the global market, and we are being forced to adopt it as the only means of development and progress for our countries, although it comes along with humanitarian and ecological impacts of catastrophic proportions.**

The aim of the Forum for Resistance to Agribusiness is to gather together like-minded organisations and denounce the political Agribusiness plan, and in doing so, take the first steps **towards promoting an initial dialogue for the organisation in our region of a common opposition front to the political and economic model** of agribusiness.

The Forum met to oppose two major 'agribusiness events'. The first was the **World Conference of IAMA** (International Food and Agribusiness Management Association), which took place in Buenos Aires from 10- 23 June, entitled "Agribusiness, Food, Health and Nutrition". IAMA has 700 members from more than 50 countries and brings together the largest multinational companies. The organisation has Heinz Imhof (chairman of Sygenta) as its President and Morton Satin (Director of the Food and Agro-Industries for FAO) as its Executive Director. IAMA is also part of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), an organisation that has a great deal of influence within the United Nations and is said to be a principal player in providing commercial advice within Biodiversity Agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol and Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The second event was the **MERCOSOJA** which took place from 27 to 30 of June in Rosario, Province of Santa Fe. Mercosoja was created by companies such as Bunge, Cargill, BASF, the Bank of Galicia, YPF, and Bayer, and brought together around 500 businessmen from the Southern Region of Latin America.

### 2. Focus

Resistance to the above operates at various levels of struggles, awareness and organisation. Nevertheless, the separation between the local actions of social movements and the actions carried out by activist groups tends to weaken us when faced with this devastating model that affects us all. For this reason it is necessary to generate synergy and take a step beyond diagnosing and denouncing the situation and unite to develop effective strategies.

**Our task is to understand the power that these agribusiness hold within the political**

**arena and how this affects society as a whole.** In order to achieve structure in the way we work, we have approached the complex agribusiness issue by presenting a series of themes. These issues follow the process of thought, ideas and concepts put forward at the conferences, as well as discussions developed within the Forum. We hope that they will serve as a starting point for debate within other sectors of society. The themes developed were as follows:

- 1      **The Neo-colonialism of the agribusiness.** Regional integration designed for the corporations, with its maximum input in the IIRSA plan (Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America).
- 2      **Climate change.** Faced with the end of the petrol era and global warming, biofuels have arisen as the new source of energy; the new ‘carbon market’ which justifies emissions from the industries of the North will result in the expansion of the soy and forest model.
- 3      **What town for the countryside? What countryside for the town?** Agrobusiness control the countryside and redesign population distribution within large urban centres. The large supermarkets control access to food and manipulate our food culture. The citizenship is thereby reduced to the role of mere consumers.
- 4      **Agrarian reform and food sovereignty.** The fight for the land and local development gives a horizon of resistance to this model and highlights the creation of another type of society within the countryside and towns.
- 5      **Agro-industry versus human rights.** Contamination with agro-chemicals is a form of genocide subjected onto rural populations. This model progresses through the use of violence, through the militarization of the countryside, and by criminalising social protests, poverty and organised movements.

## Political Summary

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*“Historically, the dividing up of Latin America by international powers has pillaged and looted the continent and allocated it to the role of the provider of natural resources and producer of monocultures for export. Becoming aware of these neo-colonial equations continues to be the key to understanding our objectives and to deciding on the path to emancipation.”*

*The Open Veins of Latin America- E.Galeano*

### **1. The power: agribusiness design a political and territorial plan**

The activities of ‘**agribusiness**’ and the extractive industries **constitute the structure and origin of the majority of social and environmental conflicts in the South American region.**

A **regional strategy** and a project for **industrial integration** is being developed from the agricultural sector. Territorial domination is evident through the expansion of monoculture and the culmination of logistical routes towards the ports and from there to other countries. A specific example of this is the Hidrovia - IIRSA plan.

The power held by agribusiness within the framework of global capitalism produces a dynamic which manifests in the occupation of nation States, where agents disguise corporate politics as public policies. The influence of multilateral organisations (such as the World Bank, IDB, IMF, WTO, UN) coordinates the mechanics of this new globalisation. The multinational giants within the food sector (such as Monsanto, BUNGE, Cargill, ADM, BASF, Bayer, Sygenta, Unilever, Nestle, etc.) have done away with local economies and local markets. Industry justifies these actions through the economic logic surrounding the payment of the external debt, whilst the local political elite carry out their ‘progressive’ ideas and encourage massive support plans to back up the neo-colonial models of dependency.

This occurs in all our countries, and it is also the way agribusiness creates a political hegemony to establish the pattern for today’s colonial submission. The devastating social and environmental consequences of this bring us to the conclusion that co-existence is not possible between this political project and the development and sovereignty of our peoples.

### **2. Colonising forces in Latin America during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – the neo-colonialism of the Agribusiness versus Food Sovereignty.**

On the 21<sup>st</sup> century Agribusiness represents the perpetuation of the colonial model described by Eduardo Galeano, which has been tearing Latin America apart for the past 500 years. The monoculture model which has perpetuated since the conquest has adapted our agricultural production to the demands of the development of capitalism and, in today’s global capitalism, production has acquired a new character of dependency caused by the introduction of agricultural technology and systems of food processing and distribution controlled by large multinational corporations.

As far as the protection of intellectual property (TRIPS – WTO) is concerned, the agribusiness production process encourages **dependence on technological packages**. Our

national economies are conditioned by changes throughout the process from genetically modified seeds right through to the supermarket shelves, and our food standards are subjected to an increasingly homogenised and globalized culture.

The expansion of industrial agriculture to enable the production of commodities generates the chemical contamination of water, air and remaining natural resources, as well as the resulting loss of biodiversity. The effects caused by this production and consumption model are the cause of climate change, global warming and the erosion causing desertification of the land, and through this, the threat to the continuity of life on the planet. The climate change crisis which has been created by the industries of the Northern Hemisphere forces us to face up to the threat of biofuels and what is represented by their requirements for additional lands for cultivation. The poignant fact is that even the capitalist system is aware of the intrinsically destructive force of these actions, whilst continuing to maintain the current market dynamics via “sustainability” and “conservation” strategies.

The cities, increasingly violent and overpopulated, suffer the consequences of uprooted communities and the loss of culture, and the imposition of convenience consumerism of the residues of the globalisation trade are clearly evident. Rural and family-based agriculture, areas of natural reserves and the territories of indigenous people make up the main areas of resistance to the advance of the agribusiness.

During the past decade rural organisation and resistance has created an international movement, the “Via Campesina” whose function is to unite and represent the demands of the rural communities. Its greatest strength and weapon is the creation of the concept of **Food Sovereignty**, a paradigm of the fight for holistic agrarian reform. This proposal claims the right of each community to have the freedom to decide on the marketing of surpluses, only after having guaranteed its own nourishment through its own resources on its own land and through the use of agricultural practices which are environmentally sound and healthy. The movement is against the diet imposed by the agribusiness, and also works towards engendering respect and knowledge of rural ways which preserve the diversity of local culture and agriculture. **Food sovereignty constitutes the main thrust of the fight against agribusiness.**

### **3. Uniting forces: Biodiversity and Agrarian Reform**

The ecologist movements, and the rural organisations and Indigenous communities of Latin America have increasingly denounced the capitalist model of production and consumption and its effect on the quality of life in our communities. Awareness of the existence of these two campaigning movements, their denunciation and fight against the system, highlights the need to work on ample convergence processes. **It is imperative that new paradigms are developed to generate thinking and political action.**

The forum **created a space in which ecologist groups, community organisations, researchers, Indigenous communities and rural movements from the regions of South America could come together.** In order to understand the chain of degradation, violence and the constant crises suffered by all, the Forum has attempted to pull together the different perspectives of its members and in this way establish the role and significance of the agro-industry in these events.

In these times, our global responsibility does not allow us the option of favouring outdated concepts. We are forced to rethink entrenched ideologies which stand in the way of real alternatives to the science and technology plan. To the vision of limitless progress which has been

imposed on us as the only way forward for the development of humanity. Even progressive discourse bases its proposals in science, technological development, modernism and progress. Therefore, we need to be daring enough to look at things in a different way.

#### **4. Agriculture and Capitalism – Ecology and Politics**

The introduction of new mechanisms for appropriation, marketability and exploitation of biodiversity (such as intellectual property and integrated production chain) only serve to enhance capitalist accumulation to levels which had previously been unimaginable.

The most obvious element of this is genetically-modified agriculture, in which control and domination of the industry become structural. Seeds are the fundamental production resource for life and agriculture and for this reason they are the basis of reproduction for the whole biotechnological system of Global Capitalism.

The changes in agriculture, the expropriation and separation of men and women from their land (as well as the transformation of land into private property and turning it into a marketable resource) are the basis of the historical origins of capitalism and urban, industrial societies. **Today, in order to maintain the system, globalisation is achieving an even more radical and fundamental transformation: the conversion of agriculture into an industrial activity.** The ability to identify how this is taking place, its impact on people and the environment, on our cultures and biodiversity is our greatest challenge for understanding the system and enabling us to change it.

Our main task is to place rural issues, peasant communities and their connection with the land, and our cultural diversity at the centre of political action. Rural and indigenous resistance and new ideas and thoughts arising from Ecology throw doubt not only on the efficacy of the capitalist system but on the idea of urban, industrialised, technological societies. The alternative proposed is a reconciliation of our relationship with the planet, which is our home, and with nature, which we are a part of..

#### **5. Proposals: Resistance against the agro-industry, a first step forward**

The agreements reached by Forum participants include the need for awareness of the significance of the advance made by the agro-industries, and to place this debate at the heart of political discussions in our region. This was felt to be more important than visions of the future or our various differences.

It was also agreed that only a single strong alliance of the most active sectors within the urban and rural areas can put a stop to the current political activity and bring new possibilities to the region. In order to take this considerable task forward, it is not only necessary to adopt a broader position, but also to take account of new urban or rural social groups wishing to join us in a common cause.

Lastly, we are aware that **a plan for autonomy, emancipation, and to regain our political sovereignty is essential today, and will come about through regaining our Food Sovereignty.**

**The next steps:**

1. It was decided that, in order to continue with this initiative, we will increase the number of organisations taking part, and thereby incorporate greater diversity at a regional level. It was also decided that this initiative would be reinforced through the development of workshops to take place nationally.
2. The organisers of the Forum have committed themselves to maintaining the website [www.resistalosagronegocios.info](http://www.resistalosagronegocios.info) and using it for uploading relevant documents and information. The organisers have also taken on the transcription of the discussion panels which took place during the Forum, and the development of tools, such as manuals and slides to facilitate the workshops.