

CAN FAIR TRADE HELP FEED A HUNGRY WORLD?

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The land is life, it is our source of food and nourishment and that of every living creature on this planet and yet we humans, the species with the brains, with intelligence, the species that has come to dominate the earth are in the process of destroying it, or standing by while it happens. We are here today because none of us want to be part of this, none want that to happen and for sure all of us are striving to prevent it with heart and mind.

Working to make this a more just world, through Fair-trade projects and practices, empowering small farmers and changing unjust practices and systems by lobbying for new laws to protect the environment and helping the victims of abuse and exploitation has been at the center of my mission for the past 40 years in the Philippines. On my missionary journeys to many counties and here today, I try to inform, and encourage people to take more local action that contributes to global change, combat climate change, destructive mining practices and environmental destruction.

It is by sharing our knowledge and experience, insights and understanding that we can empower each other, enable each other and be united in making this a more just world. Fair-trade is for us more than buying and selling products at fair prices. It is much more. It is working for the enhancement of human dignity. Nothing dehumanises people as much as abject poverty and hunger.

It is my hope that we will be renewed in our commitment to work for justice and stand united against the destructive forces that damage the sources of life, the soil, the rivers, the forests, the lakes and oceans and all the creatures that make this beautiful planet what it is. We need to renew our commitment and do all we can to stand together and promote life-giving solutions to save the earth and undo the injustice and oppression, exploitation, suffering and hunger that is the plight of 1.02 Billion people, deprived of the means and resources to feed themselves - a shocking figure released last October 14, 2009 by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. That is in fact an increase from 854 Million undernourished people in 2008, an additional 146 million.

We are here to strengthen our solidarity because we are up against forces that create poverty and hunger. These are global - financial, economic, commercial and political forces that have little or no respect for life, human dignity or for the magnificence of creation. They are the money moguls, merchants of death, the greed driven tycoons that kill to possess the earth, to own the kingdom and take it away from those to whom it belongs - the people, the poor, the deprived, the downtrodden and to leave them malnourished, weak, and sick.

Hunger in a rich world is also caused by the legacy of leaders and institutions that have been entrusted by their citizens, members and followers to stand against such injustice and evil that are frequently compromised, corrupted and become part of the evil systems.

All the 'ISIMS' of society, socialism, capitalism, communism have generally failed to solve world hunger, poverty and the injustice that causes it. The unfair trade practices, the domination of the global economy by a few vastly rich nations and multinationals and financial institutions have much to answer for. They have placed themselves beyond accountability. Although some will claim that much progress has been made to reduce poverty and hunger in some areas, the shocking single statistic of 1.02 billion undernourished and hungry people mostly mothers and children, with hands outstretched like victims of a permanent famine tells the truth. The rich are richer and hungry are starving.

Where are they you might ask ?

Most are in Asia 642 million,

Sub-saharan Africa 265 Million,

Latin America and the Caribbean 53 Million

Near East and North Africa 42 Million

developed countries 15 million.

Children suffer most from this global malnutrition. If they don't get the basic food intake between one to three they are brain damaged and if they survive join millions of children that are unable to learn and uneducated and can never have a decent job, and a life of dignity. Undernourished children are sick 160 days of the year and this leads directly to the death of an estimated 5.4 million children every year. Another 5 million children die because preventable diseases diarrhoea (61%), malaria (57%), pneumonia (52%), and measles (45%) which do their deadly damage because the children are so weak from malnourishment.

Part of the development of Fair-trade is to oppose and counter the unfair and corrupt trading practices that dominate the global economy that are a major cause of poverty and hunger. The natural resources of developing nations are plundered in environmentally destructive ways by local corporations, owned by the political elite, working with global mining and agri corporations.

They promote open pit mining and export the raw materials that they use to manufacture high value products that they then sell back to the poor nations to whom they lend the money to buy them. The national debt soars and the country is controlled through debt in this way. Political and economic control through debt creation has been a foreign policy strategy of powerful nations in the past. It is their stranglehold on the poor nations. (Confessions of an Economic Hit Man is a book written by John Perkins and published in 2004.)

The Jubilee campaign tried to wipe out such unjust debts. The vested interests of the ruling elite in the developing nations like the Philippines control the congress and pass laws to facilitate the economic interest of foreign powers such as payment of foreign debt servicing and global mining and farming. A standing law gives foreign corporations total mining rights and control of the land area allotted to them by approved mining permits. Corrupt government officials facilitate the mining activities that are destructive and illegal. Compliance with environmental protection requirements are eased. Local people have no real say in what the mining corporation does. There is a law that makes the servicing of the foreign debt the first priority, over the needs of the hungry and landless citizens.

Thousands of brave and dedicated people in the Philippines are working to oppose the destructive open pit mining and have succeeded greatly in Cotabato where a provincial ban on open pit mining has been achieved only one month ago. The good news is that the newly elected president, Noynoy Aquino, has taken a stand against government officials trying to get the ban revoked on behalf of the mining corporations. He has said that the voice of the local people will be the final decider. 12,000 people marched recently to support the ban. In Northern Luzon people have given their lives to stop mining and environmental destruction that is destroying the arable food productive land of farmers.

Preda is an active member of the anti-mining coalition of 150 NGOs and one of our partners suffered in the campaign.

Gensun Augustine, 30 years old of Buguey, Cagayan, Northern Luzon, led the campaign against the massive excavation and export to Korea of the huge volumes of black sand and the precious black magnetite they contained. The beach sands are being excavated and shipped in barges to waiting Korean ships off the Cagayan shore with the connivance of a powerful political clan in the province. The lowering of the beach levels and removal of these natural barriers to the sea will allow the ocean to flood the surrounding farming areas destroying the arable land of the small farmers. Last March 2009 Gensun was assassinated by two men riding a motorcycle as he stopped at a roadside canteen.

Climate change is a huge threat to the productivity of the land to produce food. Droughts and floods are linked to deforestation and much of this is caused by the

production of "energy -crops" for bio-fuels. Land that ought to be producing food to bring down the cost of commodities and reduce world hunger is turned to bio-fuel production that is driving up the cost of food commodities.

In the UK, the most prolific agricultural Biomass Energy crop, is Miscanthus, it has been planted on another 1,000 Hectares in the spring of 2010, adding to the estimated 10,000Ha already planted. When mature, this crop will replace approx 70kt of Coal in the UK's power stations, reducing the UK's carbon footprint by almost 200kt annually. But is burning bio-fuels from crops the way to reduce CO2 and reverse climate change? Or should the land be used for food production and energy from wind and solar be expanded? This kind of energy crop farming is subsidized by the government grants of up to 505 implemented by Natural England under the governments Energy Crop Planting scheme (ECS) <http://www.energycrops.com/news2.php?id=1>

In Brazil, Shell has turned away from investing in sustainable energy production such as wind and solar power to plant more fuel crops for bio-fuel production in a deal with Cosan, the Brazilian bioethanol producer of 2 billion litres a year, made from sugar cane. Almost all new cars in Brazil run on ethanol. By doubling production with Shell's investment, million of hectares of land destined for food production will go to grow more sugar cane which is fertilized with fossil fuel.

More dependency on oil and more oil drilling will result and in turn more oil spills are likely. Growing energy crops will reduce the land for food production and force more rain-forest destruction. Using ethanol in cars will emit 71% less co2 but the overall effect on food production will be damaging to the hungry. Food prices will rise - a major cause of malnutrition. In the UK 2.7% of transport is fueled by ethanol and by 2014 it will be 5 percent. What should the priority be, land for crop fuel for cars or to produce food for the hungry? Jatropha curcas seeds is used for making biodiesel fuel in Philippines, but the farmers contracted to grow it instead of food crops are complaining that they are not receiving the promised price per kilo for the seed. They have created a food shortage in some areas.

Global land grabbing for food production for the rich is spreading. It is no secret that giant multinationals corporations and even other sovereign nations covet more than the minerals, but also the arable the land in the developing world. They are devouring more and more land across the globe in the great international land grab of the century.

According to the UN and global analysts, at least 30 million hectares are being acquired by rich nations to grow food, not to produce and sell back to the poor of the developing nation who own the land but for their own people, to provide them with a more secure food supply in the face of climate change.

They will feast securely while the poor will continue to starve. The corrupt politicians of the developing nations, are giving away public lands by long term lease to foreign buyers. These are lands that ought to be distributed to the rural poor to farm and grow food for their communities.

Already 20 million hectares, half the size of the arable land of all Europe has been already sold. Africa is a prime target. South Korea got 700,000 hectares in the Sudan, one of the poorest nations on the planet, and is getting 94,000 ha in Mindoro, in the Philippines for a period of 25 years. When South Korea got 1.3 million hectares in Madagascar on a 99 year lease, they paid nothing for it. There was outrage, and a quick coup and the sitting president overthrown. The new government rescinded the deal.

At the time Hong Jong-wan, a manager at Daewoo said. "We want to plant corn there to ensure our food security. Food can be a weapon in this world," he said. "We can either export the harvests to other countries or ship them back to Korea in case of a food crisis."

China is trying to get 1.24 million hectare in the Philippines also. Qatar was negotiating a deal with President Macapagal-Arroyo to get 100,000 ha. Saudi Arabia bought 500,000 ha in Tanzania. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is closing an 8 million hectares land sale to South African businessmen. This kind of trading in land deprives the poor of the mean of food production .

In the Philippines, about 200 families own or control 70% of the wealth . The control the congress and the army ensures their survival. Only a handful of rich families, politicians, and tycoons own or control most of the private arable land in the Philippines while the majority go landless and hungry. For example, 7 out of 10 peasants still do not own land while less than 1/3 of landowners own more than 80% of agricultural land. Not only has the land reform project (CARP) failed . Only a fraction (17%) of the 1.5 million hectares of private lands has been fairly redistributed to the tenants who worked the land.

Three years ago, almost 33 percent of Filipinos were living below the poverty line. Now it is even worse because of the recession. As of 2005, 10.8 percent of the country's population survive on just \$1 a day, and another 41.2 percent make do with less than \$2 daily. 7 out of 10 peasants still do not own land while less than 1/3 of landowners own more than 80% of agricultural land. In 2006, the Philippines oil companies extracting and retailing fuel earned PHP 110 million a day, today it's even more. The poverty situation in the Philippines, according to the World Bank, is worse than that of its counterparts in the region. This is a major cause of poverty malnutrition.

Fair Trade has been an important part of my work and life since I first came to the Philippines 40 years ago and today it more important than ever. It all began when I started a small handicraft basket and rattan chair making project in Olongapo City to help street youth and drug dependents find a self-reliant livelihood and restore their self-esteem. I went to buy raw materials from the indigenous people of Subic and Botolan in the Province of Zambales . This was the first Fair-trade project of the Preda Foundation.

The Aeta people of Zambales are the original inhabitants of the Islands but as usual the colonialists, and later the ruling elite, exploited them and took their lands, destroyed the rain forest and only left them the mountain peaks where the bulldozers and logging trucks could not reach.

I discovered that the traders of rattan and wicker were not paying the indigenous People in money - instead they had set up barter trade. In return for their cut rattan poles they gave a sack of rice and some canned foods. The rattan was worth ten times more that that. I set up a trading post with the Aeta people, made friends with them and agreed on the just and fair payment that was their right and due. It was our first Fair-trade project. Later we taught them to use their own materials to make baskets and find them a market.

It became a life long relationship and through the Preda foundation we were able to help the Aeta people organise and empower themselves and share development benefits because of Fair -trade. That community was later assisted by Preda to become self-organized, educated, empowered, and in January they won back their rights to their ancestral Domain.

That's what Fair-trade is all about: it is doing justice for exploited people, creating jobs, providing markets, protecting the environment, building sustainable livelihoods where poor people can enjoy prosperity and end hunger and malnutrition by their own efforts and enterprise. Helping people to help themselves is our motto.

Preda Fair-trade expanded its development assistance to groups of scavengers, sewers, craft makers, small farmers, weavers, stone carvers and many more producer groups. The project

gives interest free production loans and training and access to markets. Fair-trade means giving the producers just wages and dignified and healthy working conditions. It helps protect and improve the environment, promotes organic and chemical free production and is the road to sustainable living. Most products use renewal raw materials and the producers are encouraged to plant the raw materials and harvest them as needed.

Fair-trade brings benefits for the producers but also for the buyers of the products. They join in the struggle to change the unjust trading system. They are making an ethical and moral statement by buying fair-trade products and are in solidarity with the exploited by using their consumer power to help them. The people in Fair-trade and World shops in the developed and developing world do fantastic work. Most are volunteers and they are dedicated to helping educate the public in about the causes of exploitation, the injustices of the world trading system and they promote Fair-trade.

Fair-trade is fighting against the exploitation of farmers, workers, producers but also against the unjust system that allows that unjust trade to destroy the lives of so many. At Preda (www.preda.net) we implement what we call developmental Fair-trade. We campaign to protect the environment, we plant thousands of trees with the farmers, work to stop the trafficking and sale of women and children, provide protection for victims, combat sex slavery and sex tourism and child labour. Developmental fair-trade is putting faith, principles and words into action. It is more than just buying and selling products it is empowering the people through education and economic development at the village level.

Acting justly and with compassion is at the heart of fair-trade, it is directed to lift the poor out of poverty and give them a decent life based on our respect for human dignity.