

NGOs Statement on Africa 08 May 2008

Chairman, distinguished delegates.

We begin by commenting on what two of the panellists said in their presentations. One said that the problem of African agriculture is a weak knowledge base. We contest this assertion and wish to place on record that scientists and experts ought to recognise the strong community knowledge that has sustained agriculture over the centuries. Scientists should be humble and willing to learn from the knowledge base of African peoples.

Another panellist asserted that Africa should move away from the Garden of Eden mentality. We place on record that Eden was a sustainable garden until man's consumption went beyond bounds there was no problem in the garden. In other words, consumption has been mankind's problem from the beginning.

The Chair,

This CSD is a wake-up call for African governments to rise and take up the challenge of building up the continent. It is also a challenge to all to stand in true solidarity with Africa because we live in an interlinked world and the crises facing mankind today do not respect continental boundaries. NGOs and governments have complementary roles in this regard.

As we review Africa in the context of the other themes under CSD16, it is pertinent to note that the challenges of Africa have been orchestrated by centuries of distorted and often exploitative relationships with other regions. We remind ourselves of the era of forced manpower extractions, the era of colonialism and the ongoing era of neo-colonialism powered by the machinery of neoliberalism and all its trade rules and baggage.

NGOs believe that this review session is an excellent time for careful interrogation of notions that portray the continent as helpless. These sorts of analyses are used to force the continent to accept externally generated solutions that, rather than help, often deepen the crises on the continent.

Dumping of surplus agricultural produce from subsidized production in rich countries, while IFIs oppose and block subsidies in Africa, is destructive to the agricultural sector and markets in Africa

African governments have not made sufficient investments in agriculture and this should change. This needs not be done under frameworks such as AGRA which has laudable intentions but unfortunately seeks to promote GMOs in Africa as a solution. More research is needed for increasing yields but this must be demand driven, take cognizance of local knowledge and include concerns of social equity and environmental sustainability.

Sustainable development in Africa will remain a pipedream if economic policies imposed by international financial institutions continue to weaken progressive local controls, keep the region as a perpetual provider of raw materials and promote continual accumulation of odious external debt. WTO rules, EPAs and other trade arrangements must be carefully reviewed.