

Conference on Land Grab and Just Governance in Tanzania

St. Gasper Conference Centre Dodoma

September 13-15, 2016

Final Communiqué

From September 14 -15, 2016 we, the participants from diverse religious bodies, the university communities and civil society organizations from all over Tanzania gathered at St. Gasper Conference Centre in Dodoma to discuss the issues of just governance and land grab in Tanzania. Following vigorous, structured and fruitful deliberations by specialists and panelists including contributions by the participants, we came to the conclusion that the current large scale land acquisition by corporations and individuals need to be reviewed and possibly put a moratorium on the process until the full implications for the citizens of Tanzania are analyzed.

The much touted propaganda on the contributions of large scale farming as a solution for food security, when examined closely is basically a misinformation that has carefully excluded the unfulfilled promises, the negative impact on small scale farmers, the confiscation of water sources from local communities, the threat to marriage and family life and the inherent risks of industrial mono-cropping and consumption and the loss of biodiversity (and goes against sustainable development goals). Large scale land acquisition has sown communal conflicts in many communities in Africa.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to put a moratorium since in its present practice the project has no real contribution to national food sovereignty of Tanzania. Rather, it is part of the western development and capitalist economic regime that continues to make Africa a resource continent and market for finished products. We note that these corporations are appropriately designated as investors. No one goes to invest unless one has already calculated and maximize profits from that investment. Land dealers are primarily out for profit and they are doing so at the expense of Tanzanian citizens.

We remind our leaders that the citizens of Tanzania are the most precious resources for the country, of which they have a moral obligation to protect their rights and dignity. We remind our leaders that a just government in a democratic state includes her citizens in decision making process, puts the common good of the people over all other considerations, and weighs long term consequences of programs it undertakes.

Tanzania's fertile land guarantees food sovereignty for her citizens. Therefore, hunger is due to lack of adequate support of small scale farmers and poor infrastructure for preservation and distribution of food. It has been ascertained in Tanzania and throughout Africa that small scale farmers produce about 70% of the food we consume. We, therefore request Tanzania's Government to invest more in our small scale framers to produce the food that we need, and ensure adequate infrastructure for the distribution of food.

Large scale farming has proven to have a negative impact on the ecosystem and food cultures of people. Critical input and public participation in this process will enable Tanzanians to determine their food cultures and systems. The potential short-term gains from large scale farming has long term cultural, ethical and ecological impacts and diminish the positive contributions of small scale farmers in feeding the country, promoting cultural practices, community well-being, traditional crops and varieties, reducing rural unemployment, raising the quality of life of indigenous peoples and re-affirming food security.

We are aware that large scale farming assumes to solve the problem of food shortage. But a close examination reveals that what is perceived as "food shortage" is not the lack of food production, rather, it is the lack of infrastructure for food distribution, the failure to empower local farmers to produce food they already know how.

We are also deeply concerned about the long term damage of appropriating the rights of food production for Tanzanian citizens to trans-national corporations. A country that depends on outside source to feed its citizens sets itself up for disaster and the control of its population by the corporate world.

As we reflect on Tanzania's demographics over the past fifty six years, we noted that in 1960 Tanzania's population stood at 10.1 million. As of January 2016, the population was estimated at 54.3 million, implying an additional 44.2 million over that period. Given this trend, we wondered the wisdom and foresight in appropriating large chunks of Tanzanian lands to foreign corporations some for 99 years lease. Are we not setting up conflict over land for future generations?

We implore our policy makers to learn from the experience of a host of other countries who have suffered from the false gospel of large scale farming and agricultural development. We, therefore, appeal to the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania to conduct a thorough socio-economic, ecological and cultural impact assessment of large scale farming on the present and future of its citizens. Let it not be said of this generation that they mortgaged the future generations Tanzanians for perceived short term gains.