

PRESS STATEMENT

Protecting Asian Women's Rights in Rice Culture

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) United Nation, has declared the year 2004 to be the International Year of Rice and they have a series of activities throughout the year under the title International Year of Rice. The FAO is drawing public attention to the importance of rice all over the world. The whole agenda of the activities focuses more on increasing rice productivity, biotechnology and rice trade. According to International Women's Day on March 8, the FAO is sponsoring a Regional Consultation on Gender Dimensions in Asian rice livelihood systems. The issues of women have again been raised as the important agenda for rice and agriculture.

Women used to play a very crucial role in rice culture. They are very knowledgeable and are a key actor in rice seed saving. They work hand in hand with men in sharing half of the labor of the family in rice culture. From previous time until now they have worked as a food security custodian at the household level.

However, the industrial agriculture model which pushes farmers to become dependant on agri-business agenda of chemical input has eroded the role of women in the rice culture. The traditional knowledge of women in rice seed saving has been pirated and the rights of peasant women have been violated by transnational corporations. Modern technology is controlled by state extension and transnational corporation is eroding the role of women in rice farming. The women's role in protecting food security at the household level has been manipulated by national and international trade policies. In a nutshell, women's role in rice culture is being destroyed by industrial agriculture and neo liberalism which focuses on increasing rice productivity, biotechnology and international trade policies.

So women are the victim of national and international rice policies. It has been proven that, nowadays, the role of women in rice culture has been neglected and oppressed.

For the International Year of Rice with a focus of productivity, biotechnology and free trade promoted by FAO, the women's rights will not be strengthened, but rather will be undermined and destroyed by these policies.

The East Asia Rice Working Group (EARWG) is a network of NGO and Peoples' Organizations from developing countries in the region. We are involved in national and international policy, research and advocacy on development concerns related to rice and capacity building among small-scale rice farmers and network members.

We, insist that the FAO needs to raise the issue of women in rice culture by women's organization perspective. The rights of peasant women in seed saving, women's traditional knowledge and role as food security custodian needs to be recovered and strengthened. The voice of the women's peasant network has to be respected, heard and put into action.

Reclaiming women's rights in rice culture in International Year of Rice.

**East Asia Rice Working Group
March 8, 2004**