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Statement from HASATIL for World Food Day

Today, October 16th, 2013, many nations around the world celebrate World Food Day. Unfortunately, in this world we're living in, a lot of poor people are hungry because they do not have access to food, while at the same time many wealthy people suffer from health conditions due to excessive food consumption or imbalanced food diet. Globally, there is enough food for everyone to consume, but it is unequally distributed.

The official theme of this year's World Food Day is: **"Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition"**. This is an opportunity for us to question about:

- Non-sustainable food systems that produce poor quality food with low nutritional values, like the processed industrial products full of preservatives, salt, sugar (e.g. in instant meals) and industry-related pollutants.
- Non-sustainable food systems that damage the environment by using a lot of energy and natural resources to produce industrial food, and causing many forms of pollution like plastics, cans and other materials used for wrappings.
- Non-sustainable food systems that create social injustice as they do not give value to the work of the farmers but instead generate huge benefits for the agro-chemical industries.
- Non-sustainable food systems that have altered our food habits, traditional cooking and culture to eat in season, and have lead us to consume a limited variety of food and to prefer unhealthy instant meals.
- Non-sustainable food systems that promote an industrial agriculture model based on mechanization, the excessive use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers and water, as well as standardized "high yielding" seeds produced by laboratories at the expense of the variety of local seeds that are actually more adaptable. The result is a massive loss of biodiversity.

The HASATIL Network, a network of NGOs working to strengthen sustainable agriculture in Timor-Leste, promotes the concept of food sovereignty. Timor-Leste is a small island with its own food products that need to be promoted so that we do not depend too much on food imports. We must develop the agriculture sector sustainably through food diversification and the adoption of an organic and integrated agriculture model, like agro-ecology and permaculture, which follow the natural ecological cycles.

Our message to the farmers:

Thank you for your contribution and the great efforts you make to produce good and healthy food. We should not abandon our local original food crops including the wild ones

that saved us during our long struggle for independence. We must promote food diversification in our farms, to improve child nutrition and avoid dependence on a few crop species only.

Our message to all of us consumers:

We must use our purchasing power to buy products which are healthy, which strengthen the domestic economy through the purchase of local products from small-scale farmers and which are not harmful to the environment. We must give higher value to our local products than to the imported ones and change this mentality consisting in considering eating rice as the only parameter that measures whether one has had his/her meal or not. There is a variety of food products much more nutritious than rice (carbohydrate), such as vegetables, fruits, beans, cassava, meat, fish, etc. We must not eat with the only objective to be full; we must know the nutritional value of the food we eat.

Our message to the Timor-Leste Government, which has an important role in guaranteeing that development benefit all Timorese people, of the current and future generations:

Food security must not be viewed from the quantitative aspect only. Every year we import huge amount of foods (especially rice) but our level of malnutrition remains high. We consume much more rice and much less fish than other countries¹. The Government should address the malnutrition issue from a qualitative aspect, and focus on food diversification and education about nutrition. Priority should be given to the development of the livestock and poultry sectors, fisheries, forestry rehabilitation and protection and rural infrastructure.

The Government should take measures to reduce food imports and regulate the import of chemical products that have bad effects both on health and the environment. The productive sector and small-scale sustainable co-operatives should be developed to substitute our economy that is heavily dependent on petroleum revenues.

The Government should promote a sustainable agriculture model that doesn't depend on expensive inputs, benefit small farmers and contribute to nature enhancement like agro-ecology and permaculture.

At the international level, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Sr. Olivier de Schutter has already shown that the future of agriculture is agro-ecology². Thus, we encourage Timor-Leste Government to build a sustainable food system for our nation, to guarantee our food sovereignty.

HASATIL Advocacy Team and Secretariat

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HAK Association

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Fokupers

Caritas Baucau

Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute (KSI)

Haburas Moris Organization (OHM-Maliana)

¹ Cf. KONSSANTIL Assessment Report, 2013, Quarter I.

² Cf. Olivier de Schutter, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, "Agro-ecology and the right to food", 2011.