

# PEOPLE'S STATEMENT ON SAVING THE RICE OF ASIA

**We, representing the peoples and grassroots of Asia, state our strong stand on the issue of RICE in Asia and call upon all those responsible for agricultural and food policies at national, regional and international levels to take immediate action to safeguard the rice heritage of Asia.**

## PREAMBLE

### Rice – the Life of Asia

Rice is Asia's most deeply revered treasure. It is central to the Asian way of life; its culture, spirituality, traditions and norms. The staple food of three billion Asians, half the world's population, Rice is Life to the people of Asia.

Rice has been grown in Asia for the last 7,000 years. Recent findings in China indicate that this may in fact be 10,000 years. Local and traditional rice varieties and ecological rice farming have sustained Asian rice farmers and consumers safely for most of foregone decades.

The core elements of this rich heritage of rice are enshrined in the "Five Pillars of Rice Wisdom". These are: *Rice Culture, Community Wisdom, Biodiversity-based Ecological Agriculture, Safe Food and Food Sovereignty*.<sup>1</sup>

### The Threats

In the last five decades, our rice heritage has been severely eroded and is under grave danger of being lost completely.

With globalization and the implementation of the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), control over rice production and agriculture in general has moved more and more from farming communities and peasants to agrochemical transnational corporations (TNCs) and developed imperialist countries such as the US, and those in Europe.

Arrogant trade liberalization policies coupled with corporate agriculture have wiped out and continue to wipe out peasant rice farmers all over Asia as well as small rural entrepreneurs who depend on rice for their livelihoods.

Land for rice has been converted to land for cut-flowers, bio-fuel, shrimp cultivation, cassava, animal feed, industrial use, amusement parks, real estate development and special economic zones. These so-called development projects displace farmers from the land they till.

Through the intellectual property rights regime enforced by TRIPs and bilateral trade agreements (TRIPs-plus), rice seed varieties are moving from the hands of farmers, particularly women, and indigenous communities to those of seed companies and privatized agencies.

This trend in rice production and the increasing dependency of our countries on the import of rice as food is a grave threat to our food sovereignty and national sovereignty.

Ecological rice farms which could adequately sustain farming communities in the past have been turned into corporate monocrop factories filled with poisonous chemicals. The only interest of global powers and agri-business in rice today is to make it a commodity to be traded in the international market to amass more profit.

This agenda is exacerbated by institutions like the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) which collaborate with industry and facilitate the corporate control of seeds and agriculture. The control of seeds and agriculture rightfully belongs to the farmers of the land.

Through the so-called Green Revolution, corporate agriculture has poisoned people and rice fields with pesticides and synthetic fertilizers; degraded rice lands; destroyed rice ecosystems, ecological rice practices and rice culture; and severely undermined the safety of the cereal as food.

Agri-business has paved the way for hybrid rice and now, genetically-engineered (GE) rice such as Golden Rice, Bt Rice and Liberty Link Rice, and has brought about not only the loss of strong and unique local and traditional rice varieties, but their contamination as well. The FAO promotes genetic engineering as a solution to world hunger but this is simply false propaganda. GE will only make the problem of world hunger worse.

There is sufficient evidence to show that biodiversity-based ecological rice agriculture is sustainable. Conversely, there is ample evidence to show the failures of corporate rice farming and **no** evidence to show GE Rice is safe.

## **OUR STAND**

As the people of Asia, we hereby irrevocably state our stand:

1. **We affirm that:**

- Rice Culture, Community Wisdom, Biodiversity-based Ecological Agriculture, Safe Food and Food Sovereignty should be the basis of rice cultivation, consumption and trade globally.
- Farmers' knowledge and traditional rice culture and rice cultivation practices should be conserved, preserved and protected.
- Landlessness should be addressed by genuine agrarian reform led by genuine peasant movements in Asia.
- Local and traditional rice varieties should be conserved, preserved and protected. Our rice genomes should not be given to and used by corporations for profit. Rice genomes held by research organizations like IRRI should be given back to the local communities.
- Rice-farming communities, especially peasant and indigenous communities, should be protected.

2. **We resolutely protest against:**

- The use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers on our rice farms. Rice-ecosystems should be conserved.
- The use and depletion of ground water in rice crop cultivation.
- High-input varieties and hybrid rice. Our local, traditional and farmer-bred rice varieties are good enough and healthier for us.

3. **We resolutely reject:**

- GE Rice. We do not want to feed ourselves or our children GE food in any form. We will unequivocally oppose the introduction of GE rice in Asia.
- The genetic modification, patenting or external ownership of our rice seeds in any way. There should be No Patents on Life!
- The WTO and its conditionalities and control over food and agriculture.

4. **We resolutely condemn** the actions of organizations like the International Rice Research Institute in collaborating with industry against the good of rice farmers and rice cultivation.

## OUR CALL

To ensure food for our millions and to stop hunger, rice cultivation and production and rice lands must return to our peasant farmers and communities. **It is in Rice that we reclaim our rights and the rights of our future generations to our culture, our livelihood, and freedom from hunger.**

## WE CALL UPON ALL DECISION-MAKERS OF AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD POLICIES WORLDWIDE TO TAKE THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT:

1. **Enable global and national initiatives to preserve, protect and uphold rice culture and biodiversity-based ecological rice agriculture.**
2. **Undertake genuine agrarian reform.**
3. **Preserve and protect the lands and food sovereignty,** rights and livelihoods of peasant rice farmers and rice farming communities, especially indigenous communities. Dismantle agreements, policies and laws that enable the liberalization of trade in rice and agriculture.
4. **Adopt the Precautionary Principle in deciding on genetically-engineered seeds and food.** Introduce an all-out ban on genetically-engineered rice.
5. **Adopt the policy of “No Patents on Life”.** Bar the patenting of seeds and traditional knowledge. Protect and strengthen farmers’ local seed conservation systems.

6. **Ensure the safety of rice and rice ecosystems.** Ban the use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers in rice fields. Instead enforce the use of safer, ecological-based pest and weed management alternatives.
7. **Strictly limit the use of ground water for irrigation** and ensure sustainable use of ground water.
8. **Close down IRRI** and regulate the activities of collaborating institutions, such as PRRI and BRRI, in different countries.
9. **Uphold the People's Control on Agriculture!** Implement farmer-centred agricultural research and systems.

**We urge all decision-makers of agricultural and food policies to listen to the earnest voices of the people of Asia whom you have pledged to protect and act on these recommendations immediately. Ensure the protection and well-being of all the people and rice farmers of Asia.**

**We will resolutely persevere in our stand and efforts to save the rice of Asia.**

Thank you.

**THIS STATEMENT BEARS THE SIGNATURES OF ONE MILLION PEOPLE ACROSS ASIA – FROM MALAYSIA, INDONESIA, THE PHILIPPINES, CHINA, KOREA, THAILAND, CAMBODIA, SRI LANKA, INDIA, BANGLADESH, NEPAL, PAKISTAN AND JAPAN.**

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Endnote

1. The Five Pillars of Rice Wisdom

- **Rice Culture:** rice as the embodiment of spirituality, beliefs, traditions, customs, norms, practices and celebration.
- **Community Wisdom:** the authentic knowledge of farmers gathered over generations, incorporating intuition, spirituality and ethics; and the role of women as custodians of seeds.
- **Biodiversity-based Ecological Agriculture:** chemical-free, organic, sustainable rice cultivation; the conservation of local rice seed varieties; and the maintaining of biodiversity in rice ecosystems.
- **Safe Food:** rice as a food without poisons and rice production without the utilization of hazardous technologies such as pesticides and genetic engineering.
- **Food Sovereignty:** the rights of peoples, farmers and communities to adequate, culturally-appropriate safe food; land and productive resources; and in deciding on food and agricultural policies; and the practice of gender justice.