

Real World Radio Interviews to CFS Chairman

Mr. de Luna is the President of the CFS, the Committee on World Food Security

Real World Radio.- Mr. De Luna, what is your evaluation of the steps taken during this negotiation for the Voluntary Guidelines?

De Luna: It is really difficult to evaluate it and say whether it is going slow or fast, one has to understand that tenure of land, forestry and fisheries resources is a very complicated issue and since time immemorial people have always been fighting for resources whether it is land, fisheries or forestry.

There is this sudden interest on land in the past two, three years, as a result of the global food crisis and because of this, among others, there was this scramble by many companies, many institutions to buy lands in Africa, Asia, and Latin America: this is popularly called land grabbing. That's the issue that hits the headlines. And so as a result of that, the FAO among others, made consultations with various stakeholders in the past two, three years and these consultations perhaps involved maybe a thousand people with various stakeholders in almost all the regions of the world

After that, we, member governments, drafted Voluntary Guidelines on land tenure and the decision of promoting and adapting these guidelines are a result of the 36th session of the Committee on World Food Security last year and that this year the guidelines were supposed to be adapted. There was a negotiation, there was a first step: the Public reading of the draft guidelines in June and then the negotiation proper last July but it was not concluded and currently the negotiations are ongoing. So hopefully, they can be adapted in time for the next session of CFS which is going to start on Monday.

Question is where are we? We are still on chapter 12, out of perhaps 25 chapters, now if that's slow or fast or how do I evaluate it: I think last July when we concluded the negotiations on July 15, we cleaned around 60 paragraphs out of a total 151 paragraphs. I don't know how many paragraphs we have cleaned from Monday to today, Thursday, but I am convinced that there has been very substantial progress. I'm also convinced that there is a sincere and genuine desire from member countries to conclude these negotiations because they know that this is a commitment to their own stakeholders back home.

I think with little push it can be concluded, but it depends on how member countries and other participants and stakeholders will treat the negotiations for the most contentious paragraphs which are on chapters 11 and 12.

RWR- There is concern among the civil society about criminalization, threats, murders against people, organizations which are fighting for lands, rivers, fishing. Do you think these guidelines will protect them at the end of the day?

DL- One has to understand that these guidelines are voluntary in nature and that this is not a legally binding instrument. However, if a member country agrees to these guidelines, it is hoped that there might be some moral that can influence these countries so that they can design national laws, rules and regulations governing land tenure that will hopefully first of all protect their own citizens from land grabbing, and of course protect their own citizens from being murdered, threatened, losing their political rights.

However, as I've said, one has to look at these guidelines from a national perspective. This is not a guideline that is applied pro rata across the world, this is not a guideline that is a universal formula for all countries, it applies to its all national conditions.

RWR.- It became clear after these days of discussions that access to natural commons and land is a fact of human rights.

DL- When everything is said and done, access to resources is a necessary element to realize and enjoy human rights. Now, can you say land is a basic human right? It depends how you look at it. Personally I feel that it is a right, just as water is a right, just as housing is a right, just as food is a right. The idea of human rights has evolved throughout the years, as competing pressure is exerted on finite and wielding resources. I think we have to humanize these resources, so that everyone gets some sort of justice and everyone is taken care of.

RWR.- To end, and thanking you very much for this time for Real World Radio, Mr. De Luna, what about the day after, the implementation of these guidelines?

DL.- I think you are very optimistic as far as the implementation is concerned. Let's assume for example that member countries approve the voluntary guidelines next week, then it is now up to member countries to go through it, apply what they can pick from the voluntary guidelines and hopefully use these guidelines in the development of their own strategies and projects. What is important is that voluntary guidelines do provide an element of monitoring and evaluation.

If this is going to be a national undertaking, fine, but if you are looking at it from a global perspective, and if there's going to be global monitoring and evaluation of these guidelines then I suppose we'll still have to be formed in the program of work of the FAO. Of course it will take another biennium to arrange that because member countries have to make proposals to the FAO of how this program of work will have to be articulated and funded. Right now in the program of work for the period 2012-2013, I'm not aware whether there is a provision already for the implementation of the voluntary guidelines, I think it will be presumptuous for member countries to make plans when in fact the guidelines are still being negotiated, but all of us do expect and hope that it will be approved as soon as possible, hopefully next week.