

Closing speech at the G8 alternative summit on 7th June 2007

by Vandana Shiva

Just before coming here, I was travelling through the parts of India. We've had rich soils, where cotton cultivation started and cotton was gifted to the world, but today, farmers are committing suicide in thousands. I was there to distribute seeds, because last year when I travelled to the area, it became clear that one reason farmers are in despair is that Monsanto has ensured that they have no seed left and the farmers have to buy genetically modified GNBT seed every year at high cost.

Of course the farmers think they have the choice because they get 20 different brand names, they have no idea every one of those 20 companies is licensed by Monsanto. 95% of all the GM crops being sold in the world today Monsanto has become the owner. We talked about increasing aid by 0.7%? The current aid flows are 15 Billion. Just on seed monopolies alone, corporations are looking at profits of 1 Billion Dollars a year if every farmer could be forced to buy seed every year for every season. Now in India, this combined with the free trade of WTO which is letting dumping happen – the cotton prices have collapsed to a third of what they used to be before the decade because of US subsidies – it's killing the west African farmers, it's killing Indian farmers, it's of course making clothing very cheap. That is the kind of pressure through which large numbers are being killed to keep the global supermarket going.

And I think the situation of the farmers of India who over night have ended up being in such distress.... 10 years ago, they could make their living, send kids to college; half the people sitting in Silicon Valley were children of farming parents. My mother used to be a farmer and sent me to the best of schools and colleges in England. Today, a farmer can not survive. Not in Europe, not in America, not in Mexico, and this System that is pushing thousands out of the possibility of survival is the kind of system we are up against. It's the kind of system the G8 designed, it's the kind of system they will continue to protect.

And the heart of this system is privatizing, exploiting, polluting, destroying the resources of this planet to which everyone has a right to share.

We have a very ancient text - must be 2000 years old - the *Isopanishad*, and it says: "A selfish man, over-utilizing the resources of nature to satisfy his own ever-increasing needs is nothing but a thief." Because using resources the own ones need would result in the utilization of resources over which others have a right, including future generations.

What we see in the rules of WTO, the rules of World Bank, the rules shaped by the secret discussions and lunches and dinners at the G8 are rules of theft, and it's this theft we must stop.

Patents on seed and patents on life forms were introduced to the WTO agreement on intellectual property. Angela Merkel wants to take it further, a "TRIPS plus" agreement, stronger intellectual property rights agreement.

What would it do?

It is already killing our farmers, it's already denying millions access to medicine. Novartis is trying to strike down the Indian laws that allow us to make generic drugs for the world. We produce 70% of the generic medicine of the world, including for the United States. Novartis would like to be the monopoly seller of cancer drugs - it's a particular drug called "Glivec" – and want the right to sell it under different forms and call it an invention. And we are saying: That's not, selling an old molecule once as a pill, then as a capsule, then as a powder, then as a liquid – it's not innovation.

You can not have a monopoly that you keep extending. The new monopoly is seeking monopolies on renewable technologies, thinking that out of renewable technologies there'll be huge money to be made. What is worse and something I am fighting: Monsanto is

stealing the genes for drought resistance and salt tolerance that our crops have so that they can patent the crops for climate change.

Climate change means more droughts, more floods; you noticed yesterday Oman was having floods, the desert was having floods, it was having cyclones. We need this biodiversity for dealing with climate change. Monsanto would like monopoly on this diversity to make money while people die during climate change.

The same with water: The biggest water corporations of the world – Suez, Vivendi, Bechtel, RWE - are seeking to privatize the world's water. Suez is trying to privatize Delhi's water supply. From 2002 to 2005, we built a water democracy movement. When Paul Wolfowitz came on his first trip to India, we told him - huge gathering of women, trade unions, all working together – just told him our water was not for sale, it was not a commodity.

Today, that World Bank driven project for water privatization has been defeated by peoples, citizens mobilization.

All these resources are biodiversity, our seeds, our water, our air are the commons that we share, the commons we must protect. They are being carved into the property of corporations which means the water we drink, the seeds we grow, the food we eat at every step generates profits for a hand full of corporations. The magic number somehow is five. Five water giants, five gene giants, five green traders, the magical five monopoly. These commons have to be reclaimed. I believe that is the most important, economic struggle, that's the most important peace issue, that's the most important sustainability issue.

The air, our ultimate commons, every breath that connects you to me, that connects us to the trees and the plants and the oceans has been privatized twice over. It was privatized when the fossil fuel industry, the automobile industry, the airlines industry, the agribusiness industry pumped greenhouse gasses without seeking a permission.

Today, it has been privatized in the name of a climate solution. When we met at the earth summit in Rio, the world community was alerted on climate change. The United Nations framework for the climate convention was agreed to, and at the end of it, what have we had? A few years of carbon trading, trading in pollution, so the polluter gets paid, gets rewarded. Look at the carbon markets they've created....

I think we have to be very innovative, very fast on the climate issue, not only because if we are not, the corporations will come out stronger, but if we are not creative and we are not organized, 20, 30, 40 years down the line the human species will not survive on this planet.

I really believe, the issue today, the issue of solidarity, the issue of justice, the issue of sustainability is how can we have generations in the future to whom we can hand over the precious resources of this planet. And to do that, we will have to challenge the rules the powerful make. We will have to challenge the rules of patents. Gandhi left us with a tremendous inspiration. The British wanted to monopolize salt so they could buy bigger canons to shoot the Indians. He went to the beach, picked up the salt and said: "Nature gives it for free, we need it for our survival, we will continue to make our salt." He defeated the salt laws, but a hundred years ago, I don't know how many of you are aware, hundred years ago on September 11th, in South Africa Gandhi and others refused to obey the rules of apartheid. They refused to carry identity badges that would distinguish them on the basis of race, they said: "We are a common citizenry." That was the first Satyagraha, as he called it, the fight for truth. Today, the fight for truth has become the fight for the future of humane life on earth.

So ever since the early 90s when corporations thought they have the right to declare the life on this planet their property and the G8 facilities were made for them we have been taken a commitment to say: We will never obey these perverse laws. Because we will not allow the saving of seeds and the sharing of seeds to be defined as a crime, this is our duty.

We will not allow the privatization of water, we will not allow it in our minds, we will not allow it in our communities. Water is a common resource, we will protect it and share it.

And finally the air to which climate change is linked: We can live in ways that we don't overburden the atmosphere with our pollution. Our food does not have to travel thousands of miles every day. We don't have to zip around in boring jobs, escaping to the other end of the planet where things haven't yet been destroyed to destroy them. I'm currently working on the links between agriculture and climate change. Industrial globalized agriculture is a huge part of climate change. Ecological, localized food systems are a solution to climate change, a solution to the agrarian crisis and a solution to the bad food epidemic that has spread around the planet.

Through organic farming here putting back 50% more Carbon into the soil than chemical agriculture can and in the process replenishing the life of the soil. The soil is the ultimate, forgotten part of our lives. We need to relate back to earth.

But I think the most important point in our times is co-operations and the G8 have created economies of lopsidedness so they can grow. What we need are economies of abundance so that all life grows. And of course, to find out how you create more out of less, it has to be women and the third world who will show the way.

Capitalist patriarchy has been pretending intelligence for itself while it created the stupidest recipe the human mind is capable of.

Can you imagine producing food using ten times more energy than you could use and calling it more productive? That's what industrial agriculture is! We could drive away chemical fertilizers tomorrow and have more food security on the planet.

We could drive away GMOs tomorrow and have more biodiversity and food security on the planet. And these are the issues that connect us. When we think of water and biodiversity and the air as our commons, there isn't a rich north and there isn't a poor south, there's a rich south and an impoverished north. And we need to once again remember that the natural economy and social economies of the south that have been devastated all the place for this cure of humanity across the planet, that is where the lessons will have to be learned of how to grow food without fossil fuel, how to build buildings that haven't plundered the mountains, how to have mobility that hasn't become a curse for the planet.

And of course we will have to reinvent our freedom as I mentioned. Gandhi gave us this tremendously brilliant system of the real defence of freedom. When laws are designed to rob people of freedom, the only way to stay free is by violating those laws.

Martin Luther King had to do it, Gandhi had to do it, we have to do it. And the more non-violently we do it, the more we do it in solidarity, the more we do it with deep compassion, the more power we will have to overthrow the economy of theft and decease and monopoly and annihilation and built in it's place economies and democracies that guarantee land to all. I think the GMOs end up being an error with some of this work is very very important. If we will not be able to keep our agriculture and food GMO free, we will never ever be able to defend any other freedom. It will always be talk, but we will have lost our last chance of defending freedom. And that is why travelling through the villages ... where GMO cotton has become 90% of the cotton, and yet we are ... going to reverse it. Seed by seed, farm by farm, we will rebuilt an ecological and biodiverse agriculture that nourishes our soil and nourishes our farmers and does not create the genocide we are witnessing.

But you too have the challenge. The corporation Monsanto is desperately looking for the European market. So far, you have held them, held them away. The movement, citizen movement and the government movement for GMO-free Europe has to become stronger. We just signed an agreement between governments and an independent commission to keep Europe GMO free. And next to me is Bernhard who can tell you more about the GMO free march that's being organized in July through Germany and the people who are involved

in the action between 19th and 22nd July in Berlin. Gandhi would have joined this, ... of GMO crops. Let us begin with our lives, let us begin with our food, let us begin with our farms, let us begin with our everyday democracy to reclaim our democracy. If we don't, there will not be live on this planet. We do not have the luxury to submit to totalitarianism. We need to stay free. Thank you.

Transcription by Christine Heyduck