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CoEH press release on the occasion of the international day of peasant struggles - Free zone project in Savane Diane

CoEH ALERTS ON MEASURES ENDANGERING FOOD SECURITY IN HAITI

Following the presidential decree of February 8th 2021, the European Haiti Coordination (CoEH) expresses its deep concern and full support for farmers' organizations. The CoEH was alerted by the SOFA (Solidarite Fanm Ayisyen) on land grabbing issues in territories that have previously been granted to the SOFA by the Haitian state, and that it has been exploiting since 2017.

Twenty-four hours after the end of his term, Jovenel Moïse signed a presidential decree that made Savane-Diane, in Saint Michel-de-l'Attalaye, an agro-industrial free zone. This decree earmarks at least 8 000 ha of that territory for the production of Stevia, a sweetener used in the manufacture of sugar-free Coca-Cola.

This act, whose legal foundation solely lays in Moïse's will to remain president beyond the end of his term, ultimately deprives Haiti from one of its most fertile land for food production in a country where 46% of the population is in phase 3 (food crisis) or 4 (emergency) in regard of food insecurity¹. The Savane Diane area (25 000 ha) covers about 2,5% of Haiti's agricultural land, and was classified by the Minister of Agriculture as one of 5 domains that could guarantee food self-sufficiency for the country².

Not only the allocation of fertile lands to private companies strongly weakens food security in Haiti, but it also severely affects families based in Savane Diane who derive their food and revenue from agricultural activities, as the process implies the expulsion of local farmers. According to the National Institute of the Agrarian Reform (INARA), re-assigned lands are state owned, even though private interests claim access to these lands in the name of old concession rights that expired due to lack of exploitation. It is also necessary to point out that land disputes in the northern regions of the country often led to outbreaks of violence.

This re-assignment of fertile agricultural lands intended to feed the population to the production of exported goods deprives many farmer families from their only way to survive. It might also fuel local tensions that could lead to violent conflicts. This act, implemented by an illegitimate president, is an act of violence against the Haitian people and its farmers. This presidential decree must therefore be denounced.

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¹ *Bulletin : Panier alimentaire et conditions de sécurité alimentaire, Coordination Nationale de la Sécurité Alimentaire, January 2021.*

² Protestation note of the SOFA against the free zone project in Savane-Diane, 22/02/2021.