

Major Victory for Family Agriculture in Paraguay's Senate



Asuncion, July 29 (RHC-teleSUR) -- Paraguay's Senate has approved a bill declaring a national emergency for family agriculture, a landmark victory for the country's small campesinos who have been struggling to have their debts canceled.

In an extraordinary session, senators unanimously approved the legislation introduced by the progressive Guasu Front, despite the abstention of the governing party. The bill aims to fund and restructure the debts of small campesinos — defined as owners of less than 30 hectares — with compensation of up to US\$10,000 per campesino.

The national emergency plan will be in operation for 180 days, as ministers and public institutions working with the small holding farmers will have to listen to their demands.

The decision was warmly welcomed outside the Congress building where dozens of campesinos have been taking part in a sit in for almost three weeks to add pressure on senators to back the bill.

They want the government to write off the debts of small-scale farmers, subsidize production, legalize and regularize the distribution of land and provide credits to stimulate agriculture industry.

The Paraguayan government has said it does not have the budget to cancel the debt which is estimated to affect about 17,000 campesinos and total around US\$34 million.

Paraguay has one of the biggest campesino populations in South America. About 35 percent of the country works on the land, meaning 2.5 million of the country's 7 million population are campesinos.

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