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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KOREAN FARMER'S DEATH SYMBOLIZES TRAGEDY OF THE WTO

SASKATOON, Sask.—"This tragic political act symbolizes the destruction and death that, in so many parts of the world, is the legacy of the WTO agreement," said NFU former-President and Via Campesina North America Coordinator Nettie Wiebe. Wiebe was commenting on the self-immolation (self-sacrifice) yesterday of WTO protester and peasant leader Lee Kyung Hae.

Lee Kyung Hae and more than ten thousand other peasants and farmers took to the streets in Cancun, Mexico Wednesday to protest the WTO and its policies on food and agriculture. Leaders from around the world are in Cancun at the World Trade Organizations Fifth Ministerial Meeting. The Via Campesina is a global farmers' movement made up of 97 farm organizations from 43 countries. Canada's NFU was a founding member.

NFU Youth President Martha Robbins, who was part of the demonstration, lamented the death. "It's like there are two worlds—the real world here in the streets, where millions are struggling for their lives and communities—and the WTO realm where these cries are not even heard. It's ironic that at the same time as the WTO is discussing taking down barriers for money and trade, they've raised huge barriers against the people," said Robbins.

Commenting on the death of Lee Kyung Hae, Nettie Wiebe said: "This act tragically illustrates the death and destruction that peasants and small-scale farmers are suffering around the world due to hostile trade policies. Hundreds of Indian farmers have killed themselves. Brazilian and Honduran farm leaders have been murdered for opposing the neo-liberal agenda that ruins peasant agriculture and rural communities. Many Canadian farm families are also suffering from this destruction and feeling the despair of these kinds of policies."

Lee Kyung Hae (56) had described the WTO as a source of "waves that destroyed our lovely rural communities." He had struggled as a poor farmer for many years and he became an advocate for his people and their communities. As president of the Korean Federation of Advanced Farmers, Lee Kyung Hae

had used every possible avenue to voice the needs of farmers to the WTO, including a hunger strike. He was a passionate, eloquent defender of farmers' rights.

In its news release from Cancun, the Via Campesina said:

One more time we flatly and emphatically demand that the WTO take the Agreement on Agriculture out of its agenda. We do not want one more death. We do not want people to continue to die of hunger; we do not want our land to die. WE DO NOT WANT ONE MORE DEATH.

We, farmers who ask to be heard, do not want this death to be in vain; we want a solution to the despair in which large numbers of farmers are living because of these international treaties.

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