



RED POR UNA AMERICA LATINA  
LIBRE DE TRANSGENICOS

## CAMPAÑAS

### NETWORK FOR A GMO FREE LATIN AMERICA

FOR AN ANDEAN REGION FREE OF GMO POTATO

JULY 2006

#### INTRODUCTION

The network for a GE Free Latin America (Red por una América Latina Libre de Transgénicos, RALLT) proposes the establishment of a special protection regime for potato in the Andean Community, being the Andean Region this crop's center of origin.

The Potato crop is of great cultural and social importance in Andean populations. Ever since its domestication, some ten thousand years ago, this crop has expanded in a broad banner running from the Venezuelan Andes all the way through Chile. For the time being, the potato crop moves most rural populations' economies in Andean countries. For example in Bolivian highlands and valleys, approximately 60% of rural inhabitants are directly related to the production, transformation and commercialization of potatoes.

Native potato has a cultural and spiritual importance among Andean communities, being part of most productive and social Andean rituals.

Potato's genetic diversity is so high that within one *ayllu* in Bolivia, up to 70 potato species can be found: Bitter, semi bitter and sweet varieties. Recent studies demonstrate that there are 235 potato species, both native and cultivated, each one with hundreds of varieties. This huge diversity is a source for genetic traits, so that native varieties can adapt to different environmental conditions and the region's ecosystems.

Potato is a basic component for food sovereignty of Andean communities; it's the main energy source (because of its starch contents), vitamins (ascorbic acid and part of the B complex), minerals (Potassium) and fiber. The region's annual per capita consumption is approximately 100 Kg.



The odds for genetic pollution from GMO Potato to native varieties are very high, especially if these are released into the environment.

The risks of genetic pollution include: genetic erosion, disappearance of some varieties because of genetic deviation and erosion of traditional cultural practices.

Genetic pollution can be caused by natural mechanisms of cross fertilization, given that the movement of genetic material from commercial varieties to traditional and native relatives is possible.

Another source for genetic contamination can be the region's very own cultural practices, as seed exchange among peasants, which has allowed this crop's maintenance and the expansion of its great genetic variability.

Pollution from GMO potatoes to their native relatives can lead to the appearance of super weeds, impossible to control, because these could be fit with resistance traits acquired in the genetic transformation process.

We are therefore worried that in the region's research centers genetic engineering works are taking place aiming to develop different types of GMO Potato.

The use of GMO crops resistant to plagues or diseases has caused the appearance of plagues resistant to the genetically introduced toxin. It has also been registered that the toxin also affects other beneficial organisms as insects involved in polinization, biologic control agents, microorganisms that ensure the soil's fertility and others.

In herbicide-resistant GMO crops, a greater pesticide use has been observed, with the appearance of super weeds and new plagues and diseases affecting these crops.

There are also risks to human health.

For these reasons, there are several regions in the world that have declared themselves "GMO free", and in some cases specific bans have been declared on some crops. For example there is a particular prohibition to carry on research with GMO Potato in Ireland.

This is why we request the Andean Parliament to promote a Protection Regime of the Andean Native Potato.

This activity is consistent with Andean Parliament goals, which among its functions, includes the participation in normative generation, through suggestions addressed to the System's organs, of projects of law of common interest. It is also in charge of promoting the harmonization of Member Countries legislations, cooperation relationships as well as coordination with Andean countries parliaments and those of third countries.

Biodiversity protection in the region has been acknowledged in the Andean Decision 523 (Regional Biodiversity Strategy for Andean Tropical Countries) which states that Andean Community Member Countries concentrate a high percentage of the planet's biodiversity, and are also the origin of important Andean-Amazon phylogenetic resources, which provide around 35% of the agroalimentary and industrial world production (including potato).



This decision outlines that the biologic patrimony represents a great strength in the Andean Subregion, and insists on the importance of this patrimony's conservation, recuperation, and sustainable use. Such activities require a consensus of policies and community strategies.

The thousands potato varieties are one of the region's most important phylogenetic resources, and must be protected from the threat the release of GMO varieties represents.

The declaration of a Special Regime for the Protection of Native Potato is an application of the Precautionary Principle.

The Precautionary Principle has been included in the 9<sup>th</sup> Preamble of the Biological Diversity Convention, of which every Andean Community country is a Contract Party. On the other hand, the Andean Community Decision 391, which establishes the Common Regime on Access to Genetic Resources, as well as the 15<sup>th</sup> Principle of the Rio Statement on Environment and Development, reassure the precautionary principle. The Cartagena Protocol also recognizes the Precautionary Principle on Biosafety.

The Network for a GMO free Latin America (RALLT), considers that there are enough scientific, legal, cultural and social arguments to declare de Andean region Free of GMO Potato.

## FOR A GE FREE ANDEAN REGION

### DECISION PROPOSAL

#### GIVEN THAT:

1. The Andean region is Potato's center of origin. This crop has a very big cultural and social importance among the region's populations. There are a great number of potato traditional varieties and native relatives in the Andean region.
2. In some research centers in the region works are being conducted to develop different types of GMO potato. The risks of genetic pollution are very big, especially if these are released into the environment.
3. Andean Decision 523 (Regional Biodiversity Strategy for Andean Tropical Countries) acknowledges that Andean Community Member Countries concentrate a high percentage of the planet's biodiversity, and are also the origin of important Andean-Amazon phylogenetic resources, which provide around 35% of the agroindustry and industrial world production (including potato).
4. This decision outlines that the biologic patrimony represents a great strength in the Andean Subregion, and stresses the importance of this patrimony's conservation, recuperation, and sustainable use. Such activities require a consensus of policies and community strategies.
5. The thousands of potato varieties are one of the region's most important phylogenetic resources, and must be protected from the threat the release of GMO varieties represents.



6. The declaration of a special regime for potato protection is an application of the Precautionary Principle. The Precautionary Principle has been included in the 9<sup>th</sup> Preamble of the Biological Diversity Convention, of which every Andean Community country is a Contract Party. On the other hand, the Andean Community Decision 391, which establishes the Common Regime on Access to Genetic Resources, as well as the 15<sup>th</sup> Principle of the Rio Statement on Environment and Development, reassure the Precautionary Principle. The Precautionary Principle is also recognized by the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

#### DECREES:

1<sup>st</sup> Art- The prohibition in the Andean Community Countries of all field trials, commercial use, manipulation, transportation, use, experimentation, liberation and commercialization (export and import) of GMO Potato, due to this crop's cultural and social importance among the region's populations, and for being the Andean Region this crop's center of origin, which could threaten this specie's genetic variability.

2<sup>nd</sup> Art- The immediate suspension of any action related to the environmental propagation, experimentation, use, commercialization, and production of GMO Potato, within the Andean Community Countries' jurisdictions.

3<sup>rd</sup> Art- the Andean Community will establish a Special Protection System for Potato. In order to do so, member countries will address resources for the recuperation of traditional varieties in places where genetic erosion is taking place, and will establish programs for the promotion of such varieties.

4<sup>th</sup> Art- Andean Community will begin a research program on Potato's biological diversity, and phyto-improvement using traditional varieties that exist in each country of the region.

5<sup>th</sup> Art- Parties in a ... time will establish a follow up system of institutions where activities mentioned in the 1<sup>st</sup> Art are currently taking place, in order to enforce this decision's observance.

6<sup>th</sup> Art- Parties in a ... time will establish a system of civil responsibility when this decision infringement occurs.

7<sup>th</sup> Art – The Parties will make up a special work group to define an Andean regional, or a national financial system in every Party destined to finance the activities foreseen in this Decision.