

RED POR UNA AMERICA LATINA LIBRE DE TRANSGENICOS



LATIN AMERICAN DECLARATION ON TRANSGENIC ORGANISMS

Latin American peasant, indigenous, environmental and other civil society sector organizations, gathered in Quito, Ecuador, in January 1999, reject the invasion of transgenic organisms in Latin America - the greatest area of agricultural biodiversity on the planet and now the second region in the world in terms of transgenic crop acreage - and we declare the following:

1. We reject genetic engineering because it is an ethically questionable technology, which violates the integrity of human life, of species, which have inhabited our planet for millions of years and of ecosystems.
2. This technology is in part a consequence but also exacerbates a global development process that is based on inequity between regions, exploitation of people and nature, and the subordination of peasant and traditional economies of Third World countries to the profit drive of transnational companies (TNCs) in the food industry.
3. Genetic engineering is a technology driven by commercial interest. It is not necessary. It forces us to become dependent on the TNCs, which control it, putting our autonomy to take decisions about production systems and food security into real danger. Especially in the field of agriculture, there are traditional and alternative technologies which do not pose such risks and which are compatible with the conservation of biodiversity.
4. Even though genetic engineering shares the same reductionism as the Green Revolution, it is radically different from conventional genetic improvement.
5. Science is incapable of predicting the risks and impacts - affecting biodiversity, human and animal health, the environment as well as production systems -- which the deliberate release of transgenic organisms may produce.
6. The deliberate release of transgenic seeds is an extremely grave threat to the countries in our region, which are countries of origin or diversity for cultivated plants and their wild relatives, as it could result in dangerous and irreversible forms of genetic pollution.
7. The commercial introduction of transgenic organisms into the market has been made possible by intellectual property laws, which privatize life and undermine basic ethical values and principles such as respect for the integrity of life. We therefore reject every type of intellectual property over life forms.
8. The introduction of transgenic crops destroys productive traditional farming systems and local rural economies by violating, among others, the collective rights established under the Convention on Biological Diversity and other multilateral agreements such as Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization and the UN Convention on Human Rights.
9. Equally, the introduction of transgenic organisms destabilizes the cultural practices



and traditional technologies of farmers, peasants, indigenous, afrodescendants and local communities, related to conservation, use, improvement, innovation and exchange of seeds. This violates the millenary rights of these communities, which have been recognized by the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

10. Furthermore, the large-scale spread of production systems based on the use of transgenic organisms represents a terrible threat to national economies of the countries in our region.

11. We are warning everybody about this danger and we condemn the imminent introduction of controls over genetic expression - such as the so-called "Terminator" technology but also others - which will produce sterile seeds and have no other objective than to consolidate monopolistic power of the global seed cartel.

In light of the above, we demand that:

- * No transgenic organisms should be released where they have not yet been released
- * The right of local and national governments to reject the introduction of transgenic organisms in their territories must be upheld
- * A moratorium on the release and commercial use of transgenic organisms and products derived from them should be established until complete evidence of their safety and absence of risk is secured and until our societies have had the full opportunity to understand and have informed debate about these technologies, including their risks and impacts, and exercise their own right to decide whether or not they should be used.
- * All decisions concerning the development, use and release of transgenic organisms should be subject to consultation and informed participation of all sectors of society, which could be negatively affected, given that genetic engineering bears risks, which can unleash unpredictable and irreversible impacts.

Annex on the Biosafety Protocol of the CBD

We entirely reject genetic engineering and the deliberate release of transgenic organisms into the environment.

We are aware that this has been going on illegitimately - whether it had been lawful or not - with serious risks for the societies and ecosystems exposed to such activities.

Given that releases have occurred and that a legal-binding protocol on Biosafety is being developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity, we want the following demands to be accounted for under this protocol:

- A. The basic principle of any policy related to Biosafety, including the Protocol, must be the "precautionary principle".
- B. The scope of the Protocol must include research, manipulation, use, transport, deliberate release into the environment, transboundary movement and labelling.
- C. All genetically modified organisms must be covered, be they living or dead, their parts (for example DNA segments, plasmids, modified virus) and their derived products.

D. Risk evaluation and management must be handled in a manner that is integrated and interdependent on all aspects of biosafety, including environmental interactions, biodiversity, socioeconomic and cultural aspects, human health and food security.

E. The Protocol must guarantee effective protection of local and traditional farming systems, food security and respect of human and collective rights.

F. All agreements and considerations related to biosafety and all multilateral environmental treaties must have primacy over trade policies and agreements.

G. The Protocol must provide efficient mechanisms to identify and assign responsibilities and sanctions, including economic liability of exporting countries and genetic engineering companies, as well as conflict resolution mechanisms which will truly protect the rights of potentially affected parties. These mechanisms must cover liability for environmental, socioeconomic and cultural harm.

H. The rights of countries to take sovereign decisions regarding research, manipulation, use, transport, deliberate release into the environment and transboundary movement of transgenic organisms, based on preliminary and informed participation of social sectors, which may be negatively affected, and which have no profit interest in these transactions, must be secured.

I. Efficient mechanisms to monitor, collect penalties on and sanction the illegal movements of transgenic organisms must be established.

J. This Protocol must apply to all countries and trading groups.

K. Mechanisms to assure transparent information important for citizens, especially related to the risk evaluation and management, contingency plans and recall measures must be provided.

Quito, 22 January 1999

The over fifty organizations that met in Ecuador are distributing the above Declaration and it is open to signatures. Please pass it on to others. Send your name and the name of the organization you represent to:

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