



"Don't shoot scientific messengers"

Early warning French Professor under severe attack by agro-biotechnology lobby

May 10, 2010 - Today the French Fondation Sciences Citoyennes (FSC) (1) and the European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER) (2) launch a public support letter for Prof. Dr. Gilles-Eric Séralini of the University of Caen (France) and his co-workers who came under severe attacks by representatives of the agro-biotechnology industry and aligned scientists.

The letter has already been signed by more than 250 scientists from 20 countries in order to defend the principles of respectful scientific criticism and the use of pluralistic expertise on issues as sensitive, complex and potentially irreversible as the effects of released GM crops. Many of them have added their personal comments, such as Prof. emer. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker from the German University of Duisburg-Essen who noted that "having looked at the publications and results of Prof. Séralini I feel that his work is as solid as scientific work can be". FSC and ENSSER are inviting more scientists and the public in general to sign the letter. (3)

The initiative was welcomed by Prof. Jacqueline McGlade, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency (EEA). In her opening speech at the recent EEA-ENSSER Symposium "Integrity of Science under Attack" she noted: "In our publications on 'Late Lessons from Early Warnings: the Precautionary Principle 1896-2000' we provide a number of examples of early warning scientists who have either been ignored or attacked because of the 'inconvenient truths' that they present".(4)

Prof. Séralini has recently published seven peer-reviewed scientific papers on potential side effects of the herbicide glyphosate and genetically engineered (GE) maize on human and mammalian health. Glyphosate was a major source of income for the U.S. company Monsanto that also dominates the world market of GE seeds, resistant to glyphosate and producing the insecticide Bt. In addition, Prof. Séralini wrote a biosafety expertise on GE eggplants (brinjal) that was one basis for the Indian government to stall the commercial release of the Bt brinjal and to launch a comprehensive scientific biosafety review. Since the stop of this U.S.-Indian public-private initiative, the scientific and personal credibility of Prof. Séralini has been repeatedly questioned in public which may have serious impacts on his professional career.

Dr. Christian Vélot, board member of FSC and vice chairperson of ENSSER, warns: "This is the most recent case in a series of incidents where vocal defenders of the status quo have ignored, then denounced and harassed scientists who dissented from the consensus of the powerful and brought warnings of impending risks. Shooting the messenger is the preferred method rather than engaging with the

different interpretations or the new science that the scientists were bringing to the public debate". Dr. Vélot is a senior lecturer in molecular genetics at the University of Paris-Sud and in 2007 encountered himself the loss of his funding and his affiliation to his research institute because of his public stands on genetically engineered organisms during TV shows and public conferences. He was pointing to the risks and uncertainties of this technology and called for an open democratic debate on the future use of GE crops in France.

Prof. emer. Ghislain Nicaise of the French Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis added: "I can bear testimony to the intellectual and scientific competence of Gilles-Eric Séralini. Knowing his courageous positions I am not surprised that he became a target of denigration."

The letter has also gained support from several academics outside of Europe. Prof. David Ehrenfeld from the State University of New Jersey (USA) stated: "I fully support Professor Séralini, and condemn the victimization to which he has been subjected. His work is respected and important. Professor Séralini brings great distinction to France, and is an inspiration to scientists around the world."

NOTES:

1. Fondation Sciences Citoyennes is a French NGO aiming at stimulating the freedom of expression and debate in the scientific world, supporting early warning scientists and the development of public controversies on key scientific issues, increasing the capacity for research and expertise of civil society organisations and citizen movements, and promoting the democratic elaboration of scientific and technical choices. <http://sciencescitoyennes.org/>
2. The "support and protection of independent and critical research" into the potentially negative impacts of new technologies and their products is a major aim of the work of ENSSER which was founded in 2009. <http://www.ensser.org/>
3. the letter can be signed online at <http://www.ensser.org/> and <http://sciencescitoyennes.org/>
4. 'Late Lessons from Early Warnings: the Precautionary Principle 1896-2000' (Vol 1, 2001; & Vol 2, 2011) http://reports.eea.europa.eu/environmental_issue_report_2001_22/en

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