

CONDEMNATION FOR COMESA'S DRACONIAN FREE TRADE POLICY ON GMOS

12 July 2009 Johannesburg. The African Centre for Biosafety (ACB) has been handed a document of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)[i] titled 'Draft Policy Statements and Guidelines for commercial plantings of GMOs, Trade in GMOs and Emergency Food aid with GMO content.' The Policy intends to undermine and displace more than a decade's worth of international, regional and national biosafety policies and legislation by usurping the policy space of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (Biosafety Protocol), regional policies on food aid and the sovereign rights of COMESA member states.

The Policy is due to be tabled at a COMESA meeting 12-17 July 2010 in Zambia.

According to ACB director Mariam Mayet "The Policy adopts an aggressive approach to the wholesale proliferation of GMOs on the African continent through a free trade agenda designed to create markets for commercial farmers in the US and South Africa."

A small group of experts closely aligned to the biotechnology, seed and agrochemical industry, including those from South Africa have drafted the Policy behind closed doors. Stakeholders, particularly African small-scale farmers have been utterly excluded from the process, despite the fact that the Policy will have a major impact on their lives.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), an ardent supporter of GMOs, especially GM food aid in Africa, has lent its considerable resource support to the process.

ACB researcher, Haidee Swanby voiced the concern that, "Regional Economic Communities, (RECs) such as COMESA are inappropriate bodies to oversee biosafety as their mandate is commerce not biosafety. This Policy is at odds with international standards of biosafety and would undoubtedly undermine food sovereignty and security in the region".

The ACB calls on COMESA member states to reject the policy out of hand and dedicate themselves to stringent biosafety regulation on the continent at the national level.

The ACB's comments on the COMESA Policy are attached.

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[i] COMESA is comprised of 19 African countries, geared towards promoting regional economic integration through trade and investment. The 19 countries are Burundi, Comoros, D.R Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

COMESA Comments.pdf

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