

Civil society statement for the FAO Technical Consultation on Low Levels of Genetically Modified (GM) Crops in International Food and Feed Trade, 20-21 March 2014, Rome

Both the Codex Annex on Low-Level Presence and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety provide full flexibility for a country to have zero tolerance for unapproved GM crops

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, wish to categorically state that the health and environmental risks related to genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are a more important consideration than so-called trade disruptions.

When we talk about low-level presence and adventitious presence of GM crops in international food and feed trade, we are talking about unauthorized GMOs that would not have undergone a risk or safety assessment in the country of import. In the case of low-level presence, a risk or safety assessment may or may not have been conducted in the country of export. In the case of so-called adventitious presence, this relates to GMOs that have been unapproved anywhere in the world.

Such contamination completely circumvents national and international laws that preserve the right of importing countries to have their prior informed consent sought, and to be able to make decisions on GMO approvals based on risk assessment. It would also mean that untested and possibly higher-risk GM crops, e.g. those intended for production of industrial biochemicals, would enter into the food and feed system, which is untenable from a safety point of view. When such contamination occurs in the form of seeds or grain, which are still able to reproduce and/or transmit their genetic information to other organisms, this risk would extend to a potential spread and further contamination of food, feed, seed and wild species.

GM crops and products that have not undergone a safety test should not be allowed onto the market, including in the guise of low-level or adventitious presence. It is the sovereign right of each country to decide on policy, including zero tolerance, and require that all GMOs are risk assessed prior to approval. Both the Codex Annex on Low-Level Presence and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety provide full flexibility for a country to have zero tolerance for unapproved GM crops.

Exporting countries should respect this and find ways to comply with the importing countries' laws, rather than pressing for contamination thresholds. Experience shows that strict control systems – both public and private – are needed to prevent any trace of unauthorized GMOs from entering the food and feed chain.

Endorsed by:

1. 49th Parallel Biotechnology Consortium
2. African Centre for Biosafety, South Africa
3. Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa
4. BARCIK, Bangladesh
5. Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN)

6. Consumers Union of Japan
7. Consumers Union, USA
8. Desarrollo Medio Ambiental Sustentable (ASDMAS), Peru
9. Earth Open Source, USA/UK
10. Ecoropa
11. ETC Group
12. Friends of the Earth Europe
13. GeneWatch UK
14. Global Citizens Alliance for Seed Freedom
15. GM-Free Cymru
16. GMWatch, UK
17. Greenpeace East Asia
18. Greenpeace International
19. MADGE Australia Inc.
20. MASIPAG, Philippines
21. Navdanya
22. NO! GMO Campaign, Japan
23. Red Por una América Latina Libre de Transgénicos (RALLT)
24. Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, India
25. Save Our Seeds
26. Sierra Club, USA/Canada
27. SHISUK, Bangladesh
28. Third World Network
29. Washington Biotechnology Action Council, USA
30. Women International for a Common Future (WECF/WICF)