

African Union requested to ban GM crops in Africa

An urgent appeal has been made to the African Union (AU) to discuss a ban on the cultivation, import and export of genetically modified (GM) crops in Africa at the next AU summit, to be held in January 2013.

An African Civil Society Statement, signed by over 400 African organisations representing small-scale farmers, faith-based organisations, social movements, non-governmental organisations, organic producers, consumers and business people, has been sent to the Permanent Representative Council (PRC) of the AU. The statement was supported by a substantive document detailing the failure of GM technology to deliver any of its promised benefits since its global introduction some 16 years ago.

The group pointed to a dire lack of safety data on GM foods and condemned the patenting of life and the privatisation of agriculture that is threatening to dispossess African food producers of control over their production systems. They have requested that African leaders address the issue at next year's summit, themed 'Pan Africanism and the African Renaissance'.

Problems will not be solved

According to Elizabeth Mpofo, chairperson of the East and Southern African Farmers Forum and member of La Via Campesina, corporate-owned, genetically modified seed won't solve any problems. "We have our own varieties, we have our own knowledge. We need to be supported so that we can flourish in the agricultural systems that are our heritage."

The appeal for a ban comes in the wake of an independent study on the long-term safety of GM maize. The peer-reviewed study, published in the Journal of Chemical and Food Toxicology in September 2012, found that GM maize and its related chemical, glyphosate, had significant impacts on the kidneys and livers of rats, their hormonal balance, mortality rates and life spans. Rats also developed significant cancerous tumours after the fourth month of the study.

"The results of this study have been discredited by scientific bodies with industry ties, but even they acknowledge that long-term safety studies do not exist and are necessary. Maize is a staple food for millions of Africans, making it imperative to ensure that it is safe in the long term," director of the African Centre for Biosafety, Mariam Mayet, commented.

Precautionary principle

International law on genetically modified crops is underpinned by the precautionary principle. It obliges authorities to stop all activity that may cause harm until safety is established. Kenya has moved swiftly to ban the import of GM food until proven safe while an Indian expert committee, constituted by the Indian government, has recommended a ten year moratorium on GM food crops.

Dr. Daniel Maingi of the Kenyan Coalition on Biodiversity, an umbrella organisation representing over 60 Kenyan organisations, congratulated the Kenyan government on their decision, saying that the highest echelon of government has reaffirmed the need to protect Kenyan consumers, farmers, environment as well as animals, in spite of the pressure from the pro-GM lobby groups.

The African Civil Society statement reminded the PRC that the the African Union has played an important historical role in shaping global biosafety policy and shown admirable political will to protect African citizens. They must now show the rest of the world that GM crops can only be accepted when society is satisfied that their benefits outweigh the risks. Currently, that is not the case.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>