

**Intervention by Civil Society Organisations to the Plenary of the
7th GOVERNING BODY (GB7) of the International Seed Treaty (IT PGRFA)**

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Opening Statement

Thank you Mr. Chair

My name is Nori Ignacio and I am speaking on behalf of Civil Society Organizations that are engaged in the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources and the implementation of Farmers' Rights.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our main expectations and concerns for this seventh session of the governing body, and re-affirm our strong commitment in contributing to the implementation of the treaty's objectives. We especially appreciate the government of Rwanda for their generosity and hospitality for hosting GB7.

We would like to congratulate the Secretary of the Treaty, Dr. Kent Nnadozie, and express our full support to his appointment.

We wish to remind the contracting parties of their commitment during the sixth session of the governing body to make progress on the implementation of Farmers' Rights, and particularly acknowledge Indonesia and Norway's support to the Global Consultation on Farmers' Rights in Bali in 2016 and their submission of the co-chairs' report to the Governing Body. However, we are concerned about the slow progress in the implementation of Farmers' Rights in many countries, including the adoption of new legislations that contradict Farmers' Rights. We regret that important points of the GB6 resolutions have not been followed-up, in particular the study on lessons learnt from the implementation of Farmers' Rights, including policies and legislations.

Experiences from the ground shows the positive impact of the implementation of Farmers' Rights and the support of on-farm management/farmers' seed systems, and their valuable contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Global Consultation on Farmers' Rights in Bali, Indonesia emphasized the need to take action through a series of recommendations that the governing body should implement. In line with the Bali meeting, we urge the formation of a working group on Farmers' Rights, that shall include as members, the representatives of farmers and civil society. This working group should have a clear mandate to guide countries in the implementation of Farmers' Rights, including the revision of national legislations so these breathe life to Farmers' Rights. We also encourage the Treaty to initiate joint programs of action with UPOV and WIPO to revise rules that impede or limit the implementation of Farmers' Rights.

We take note of the proposal of the co-chairs of the working group on the Multilateral System to establish a subscription system and mandatory payment for users to enhance the functioning of the multilateral system, and insist that the Parties require mandatory user payments to the BSF at a level that fully supports in-situ conservation needs. However, we recommend to suspend the expansion of

the MLS and the Annex 1 of the Treaty, until there is real mandatory benefit sharing with substantial and proportionate contributions from the income of seed sales, and the subscription systems has proved to be working. **There is also an urgent need to review the contractual provisions of the SMTA so that these will truly operationalize the objectives of the treaty, and implement Farmers' Rights.** Alternative means of access of farmers, as well as a guarantee that there will be no restrictions on their rights to PGRFA, and their equitable sharing of benefits from the use of PGRFA must be in place.

We welcome the work of the Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Sustainable Use of PGRFA, such as the toolbox on sustainable use and the educational module on Farmers' Rights. We urge the Governing Body to hasten the progress of this work.

We appreciate the Treaty's initiative to focus on the issue of genomics information and synthetic biology in the special side-event last Saturday. There is an urgent need for the Governing Body to take this issue seriously and discuss it as separate item on the agenda as to prevent that the use of sequence data will undermine some of the key components of the Treaty. The rapid process of digitalization of data may jeopardize the Treaty's mandate to regulate the access and benefit-sharing derived from the use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

Thank you Mr. Chair.