

**Joint Statement by Civil Society and Farmers' Organisations to the Final Plenary of the  
7th GOVERNING BODY (GB7) of the International Seed Treaty (IT PGRFA)  
Maria Josefa, Vice President CUC Guatemala, La Via Campesina**

Thank You Chair

I am Maria Josefa, a peasant farmer from CUC, Guatemala speaking on behalf of the organisations of farmers who conserve and dynamically manage PGRFA as well as about two dozen CSOs who are present at this seventh session of the Governing Body, in the beautiful city of Kigali – we thank our hosts for their hospitality. The farmers' [representatives], whose presence here has been facilitated by the IPC for Food Sovereignty and Via Campesina, come from 12 countries and from all regions of the world.

### **Introduction**

We welcome this opportunity to make a joint concluding statement and we would like to thank you, Chair, and the Secretariat, for facilitating our involvement. We have engaged actively with the GB in order to help you make progress towards realising the goals of the Treaty, especially the international recognition and full implementation of Farmers' Rights.

### **Farmers' Rights**

We celebrate the following results of the negotiations on Farmers' Rights:

1. The establishment of an *Ad Hoc* Technical Expert Group, which should be working on developing guidance for Contracting Parties on the implementation of Farmers' Rights.
2. The inclusion of farmers' organisations in this Group.

We thank the majority of the Contracting Parties who supported our rights in negotiations and made possible this step forward.

We express our great desire that the appointment of 'experts' does not lead to control of the *Ad Hoc* Technical Expert Group by the seed industry. As rights holders, we propose that the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty should facilitate the participation of the representatives of farmers' organisations, based on the rules of FAO's partnership with civil society. We further request that this *Ad Hoc* group proposes mechanisms to ensure effective enforcement of Farmers' Rights. It should submit a report to GB8 and a finalised proposal to the following meeting - GB9. It's time that all our governments reaffirm their commitment to human rights and to Farmers' Rights, in order to strengthen their role and governance.

### **MLS (Multi-Lateral System of Access and Benefit Sharing)**

We note that the work started four years ago on reforming the Multilateral System has not been concluded. Industry can thus continue to avoid or circumvent its obligations to equitably share monetary benefits, arising from the use of PGRFA, with the peasant and indigenous communities that have bred and conserved them. We remind you that first and foremost, equitable benefit-sharing implies upholding the inalienable rights of peasants to conserve, use, exchange and sell their seeds, in the same way that the industry has always used the seeds collected from peasants' fields, without restrictions and free of charge. There have been no payments made, to date. Estimates of the value of the PGRFA used by industry are upwards of USD \$270 million per year at today's prices. We regret that governments are offloading their responsibilities to pay for the implementation of the Treaty to a private sector that won't pay. Rich countries must now stop exempting patent-holding seed companies from their obligation to fund the conservation of the PGRFA that generate their monetary benefits. Such PGRFA are found in public seed banks and in peasant fields, especially in developing countries. Until real benefits flow, there should be no consideration of the expansion of list of crops in Annex 1.

### **Digital Sequence Information**

Our peasant and civil society organisations welcome that the Governing Body has finally become sufficiently alarmed about the risks posed by the dematerialisation of genetic sequences, including traits of in-trust materials. These are being patented, including by the CGIAR Centres. The consensus reached on the urgent need to examine their impact on the Treaty is a step in the right direction. Despite blocking efforts by certain countries, consideration of DSI as a substantive agenda item should lead to the treatment of sequences and materials as equivalent under the Treaty. We hope that the Treaty can act urgently before more patents on native traits fall under the control of an ever smaller number of multinational seed companies that would privatise all PGRFA essential for food security, and thus control the entire food chain.

Chair, like all Contracting Parties, we recognise that biodiversity-enhancing farmers domesticated all the PGRFA that currently feeds the world and which, managed dynamically on-farm, will be able to adapt to Climate Change and other threats, securing food for future generations. You therefore must uphold our inalienable Farmers' Rights and remove any threats to these rights. This is why the Treaty exists and why we continue to support it at all levels.

We congratulate and look forward to working with the new Secretary, Kent Nnadozie, especially in the intersessional activities on Farmers' Rights.

We request that the full text of our closing statement be added to the record of this meeting.

Thank you