

CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT

EIGHTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SEED TREATY (ITPGRFA)

International Planning Committee (IPC) for Food Sovereignty

Closing statement

Thank you Madam Chair.

This has been a tough week for all of us here. We thank the Madam Chair, Treaty secretariat, all the Contracting Parties, other international bodies and observers that were present here this week to see this process started more than three decades ago move further.

This treaty space here is a collective space created by the democracies of the world and therefore has the extra responsibility to respect and abide by the basic underlying principles of Democracy of inclusiveness and transparency while undergoing treaty processes. Unfortunately, this week saw an erosion in terms of following these processes and setting a bad precedent for our future work.

We, the representatives of farmers' organizations around the world, which constitute the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), are happy to see that the contracting parties are finally taking up issues that we have been raising for years, especially the issue of Digital Sequence Information. We want to emphasize here that DSI is not an issue for a scientific debate only. It is very much a socio-political issue, which if not dealt now in its entirety, will jeopardize Farmers' Rights to use, sow, sell and exchange Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA).

We would like to re-emphasize that not considering DSI as part of PGRFA governed by this Treaty will lead to its unregulated access which will not only deem it unnecessary to use the PGRFA in the MLS, thereby by-passing the payments to the Benefit Sharing Fund, but may restrict farmers from using their seeds if IPRs are claimed over the information on native traits.

We would like to express our support to all contracting parties which defended Farmers' Rights during this 8th session of the Governing Body and made sure the work on this important issue continues. Acknowledging Article 9.2(c) of the Treaty that farmers' participation in the decision making processes is a MUST not just for the effective implementation of the Treaty but for the

future of sustaining and enhancing seed and agricultural biodiversity which is essential for the food security of the world.

We recall that Farmers' Rights are human rights, as recognized and described in many international human right documents, which have a tight connection with many other fundamental human rights. Farmers' Rights are not in any way an exception to intellectual property rights and cannot be seen as subject to such rights.

We would like to remind all the contracting parties that in order to continue conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, we cannot ignore the new breeding technologies, like gene drives for instance, which are a threat to peasant agroecology and ecosystems that conserve the world's biodiverse PGRFA in situ and therefore are a threat to the goals of the Treaty itself.

We recall that Farmers Rights are fundamentally linked to the sustainable use of PGRFA. One billion farmers, using their innovative skills, knowledge and practices in selecting and exchanging their biodiverse seeds in every micro-climate of the world, cannot be replaced by a handful of data technicians, manufacturing seeds in their air-conditioned offices.

We all here are celebrating 15th Anniversary of the Treaty. We would like to remind everyone that this also happens to be the 150th Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the man who taught us peace and co-operation. But he also taught us "non-cooperation". Considering, that the Governing Body this week has failed to safeguard Farmers' Rights, by not taking any decision on the issue of DSI, which results in continuing bio-piracy of our germplasm, we would like to extend support to all those peasants who wish to non-cooperate with the Treaty by not sharing their in situ PGRFA until the right safeguards are put in place.

Finally, we would like to say that we continue our work, our life, we continue to provide food for people all around the world. This is what our ancestors have been doing for millennia, and now we are continuing to do so in our biodiverse, peasant agroecological food production systems. No matter how much multi-national corporations try to change this truth, nobody can ever discourage us. We continue our struggles, we keep our hopes alive, we pursue the realization of our rights, and we will survive not only for our future but also for the future of humanity as whole.

We request that our full statement be included in the report of the meeting

Thank you.