

AFRICA RESISTS US BIOTECH ONSLAUGHT AT EARTH SUMMIT

Robert Vint, Genetic Food Alert

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The US Government is using the Earth Summit to force African countries and other nations of the South to accept its GM food and crops. Acting on behalf of biotech corporations such as Monsanto, which now have representatives in key positions in the Bush administration and in intergovernmental bodies, the US Government will now only offer agricultural aid to Southern nations if it is for GM crops, only offer knowledge and technological assistance if it opens markets for US biotech corporations and only offer food aid that contains GM ingredients. \$53 million of agricultural biotech 'aid' and \$50 million of GM 'food aid' is currently being offered to Africa in an attempt to break a four year long almost continent-wide ban on GM food and crops. Back in 1998 all African nations (except South Africa) rejected Monsanto's attempts to force GM crops on the continent, their FAO delegates jointly declaring "we strongly object that the image of the poor and hungry from our countries is being used by giant multinational corporations to push a technology that is neither safe, environmentally-friendly, nor economically beneficial to us."

The most extreme form of coercion in the run-up to the Summit is the Bush government's attempt to force the famine-ridden nations of southern Africa to abandon their import regulations and accept unapproved GM 'food aid' by denying them access to non-GM supplies. \$50 million cash was offered to private food corporations in Zambia on the strict condition that it only be spent on GM maize, that this maize must be bought from US grain corporations and that it must not be milled to prevent illegal planting. Zambia's President is instead currently buying up non-GM maize from Kenya and Tanzania.

This is part of an ongoing US strategy to undermine western consumer resistance to GM food by marketing the technology as the solution to world hunger and poverty. Such claims for the technology have been rubbished on many occasions by Third World experts and development organisations such as Christian Aid, Oxfam and Action Aid but continue to be widely reported as fact by politicians and the media.

The US Government has consistently dumped unsellable GM crops via USAID and the World Food Programme on many nations despite widespread and continuous protests for several years by recipients. There were objections from groups in Malaysia, Ethiopia and South Africa in March 2000, followed by protests in the Philippines (Apr 2000), India (Jun 2000) and Burundi (Sept 2000). In January 2001 Bosnia turned away 40,000 tonnes of GM animal feed and in May 2001, Ecuador rejected aid packages containing illegal GMOs after protests by children. Similar protests followed the discovery of illegal GMOs in food aid in Bolivia (Apr 2001), Colombia (May 2001), Guatemala (Jun 2002) and Nicaragua (Jun 2002). Since June this year there have been high-profile protests by southern African nations including Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

The US Government has also consistently threatened with WTO sanctions any nation that has in any way regulated, restricted or labelled GM food or crops for 'creating barriers to trade'. For example they have threatened such sanctions against Sri Lanka (May 2001) and Croatia (Dec 2001) to break their moratoria on GMOs, against Mexico (Feb 2001) and Thailand (July 2001) to block their food label laws and against China (Mar 2002) to overturn their safety regulations on GM soya imports. Similar threats have also been regularly made against wealthier countries such as Canada, Argentina and all 14 nations of the EU.

Anger over this coercive marketing strategy has united Africa's non-governmental organisations which have issued several statements of condemnation at the Earth Summit. 126 organisations from 39 nations signed a Statement of Solidarity with the southern African nations resisting GM 'food aid'. Another joint statement, from African Civil Society groups, says: "We refuse to be used as the dumping ground for contaminated food, rejected by the Northern countries and we are enraged by the emotional blackmail of vulnerable people in need being used in this way", whilst a statement from four leading African food and agriculture experts says: "The US is disposing of its rejected food in Africa. Africa will not allow itself to become a dumping ground. This is another form of colonisation: first through slavery, then through economic colonisation and now through the control of food and medicine through GM, creating total dependency".

The US Government strategy was condemned yesterday by the UK's Chief Scientist, Professor David King, who denounced the attempts to force biotechnology into Africa as a 'massive human experiment' and 'questioned the morality of the US's desire to flood genetically modified foods into African countries'.

For further information and references see < www.ukabc.org/wssd.htm > and "Force-Feeding the World: America's 'GM or Death' ultimatum to Africa reveals the depravity of its GM marketing policy" by Robert Vint at < www.ukabc.org/forcefeeding.htm >