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Terminator Threat Looms Intergovernmental meeting to tackle suicide seeds issue

CBD's Working Group on 8(j) Meets in Granada, Spain 23-27 January

Indigenous peoples, farmers' organizations and civil society representatives are bracing to defend a *de facto* United Nations' moratorium on seed sterilization technology – the moratorium is now under attack by the multinational seed and biotech industry. A meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity, where “suicide seeds” are on the agenda, gets underway in Spain next week. The UN moratorium – which recommends against the field-testing and commercial sale of seed sterilization technology – is under attack. Delta & Pine Land (a multinational seed company) and the US Department of Agriculture recently won new patents on Terminator in Europe and Canada.¹

Terminator (a.k.a. “genetic use restriction technology” - GURTs) refers to plants that are genetically modified to produce sterile seeds at harvest. The technology was developed by the multinational seed/agrochemical industry and the US government. If commercialized, Terminator would prevent farmers from saving seeds from their harvest, forcing them to return to the commercial market every year and marking the end of locally-adapted agriculture through seed selection. The vast majority of the world's farmers routinely save seed from their harvest for re-planting.

Bombshell in Bangkok: Almost one year ago, the Canadian government and its seed industry allies made a scandalous bid to dismantle the United Nations' moratorium on Terminator seed technology at a February 2005 meeting of a scientific advisory body to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Bangkok. A leaked memo revealed that the Canadian government was prepared to push for language allowing for field-testing and commercialization of Terminator. Ultimately, the Canadian government was forced to publicly distance itself from Terminator in response to citizen protests back home, and due to key interventions from other governments that support the moratorium. (For more details: <http://www.etcgroup.org/article.asp?newsid=500>)

“The promise of increased profits is simply too enticing for industry to give up on Terminator seeds,” explains Lucy Sharratt, coordinator of the international Ban Terminator Campaign (www.banterminator.org). “Terminator seeds will become a commercial reality unless governments take action to prevent it,” agrees Hope Shand of ETC Group.

The Ban Terminator Campaign, launched in response to attacks on the CBD moratorium, seeks to promote government bans on Terminator technology at the national and international levels. It

also supports efforts of civil society, farmers, Indigenous peoples and social movements to campaign against suicide seeds.

National Bans: In March 2005 the Brazilian government passed a national law that prohibits the use, sale, registration, patenting and licensing of Terminator seeds. The Government of India has implemented a national ban on Terminator through its legislation governing plant variety registration.

One More Round in Granada: Governments will meet in Granada, Spain next week (January 23-27) to consider the social, economic and cultural impacts of Terminator seeds on indigenous and local communities, and on peasant farmers. The meeting will review an expert report on Terminator (known as the AHTEG Report http://www.banterminator.org/the_issues/indigenous_peoples_traditional_knowledge_and_biodiversity/expert_group_report_on_gurts) and make recommendations to the 8th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP8) in Curitiba, Brazil, 20-31 March 2006, where Terminator is on the agenda.

“Terminator technology is an assault on the traditional knowledge, innovation and practices of indigenous and local communities,” said Debra Harry of the Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism, and member of the expert group that examined the potential impacts of GURTs (Terminator) on indigenous peoples, smallholder farmers and Farmers’ Rights. “Field testing or commercial use of sterile seed technology is a fundamental violation of the human rights of Indigenous peoples, a breach of the right of self-determination,” said Harry.

The Ban Terminator Campaign urges the Working Group on 8j to unambiguously advise that genetic seed sterility threatens biodiversity, indigenous knowledge systems and food sovereignty. The AHTEG Report on GURTs should be forwarded to COP8 for its consideration, and the report’s recommendation that governments adopt national regulations to prohibit the field-testing and commercial use of GURTs should be strengthened.

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¹ Delta & Pine Land and USDA, EP775212B, (European Patent), issued 5 October 2005; Delta & Pine Land and USDA, CA2196410, (Canadian Patent), issued 11 October 2005