

News Release – June 25, 1999

For immediate release

## **Traitor Resolutions?**

### **The CBD as a GMO (Governmentally-modified Organism) Interminable Terminator talks at the Biodiversity Convention fail to exercise precautionary principle on threat to security and sovereignty. If the Convention can't take a stand on Terminator what can it do?**

MONTREAL: The intergovernmental consideration of a scientific report on “Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (or GURTS) has become a critical test for the UN’s Convention on Biological Diversity. The Convention, adopted at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, has been hailed by governments in the South as a treaty that once and for all establishes under international law that national governments have sovereignty over their biological resources. Now, in a meeting of the Convention’s subsidiary science committee (SBSTTA) in Montreal, that sovereignty has been challenged.

According to the report of a blue-ribbon scientific panel tabled at the Montreal meeting, GURTS – better known by the rest of the world as “Terminator Technology” - are a threat to agricultural biodiversity and to national food security. Through genetic manipulation, Terminator Technology causes any crop plant to become sterile at the point of harvest. This means that farmers have to return to multinational seed corporations every growing season rather than save and replant their own seed as farmers have done for 12 millennia. The Terminator’s inventors, more than a dozen different companies and institutes with at least 31 Terminator-type patents concede that the real purpose of the technology is not agronomic but economic – to force farmers to become repeat customers. Over 1.4 billion poor people depend upon farm-saved seed for their food security worldwide.

Faced with this scientific report, the Government of Norway proposed a “moratorium” on field trials and commercialization of the Terminator. India, Portugal, Kenya, Peru, and a dozen other countries supported Norway’s resolution. The USA and Canada opposed but only the United States – home to most of the Terminator patents – even tried to defend the technology. By mid-week, a compromise resolution was presented by the UK (second only to the USA in Terminator patents). Although the UK resolution did not call for a moratorium, its convoluted provisions would have had the same result. No field trials and no commercialization of the technology.

The UN Convention originally assumed that the discussion of the science report would take half a day at most. However, the discussions that began last Monday are still raging and a “contact group” of 13 countries met Thursday to try to resolve the impasse between the Norwegian and UK positions. When delegates went into the room the split amounted to a North/South divide with only Norway and Portugal siding with the South. When governments came out, the draft resolution came close to surrendering to the seed companies.

“Its an entirely voluntary resolution”, Edward Hammond of RAFI says, “governments may, if they wish, prevent field trials and commercialization but there is no intergovernmental recognition that the Terminator is a direct threat to biodiversity or national sovereignty over genetic resources.” “I don’t know what happened in that room, Silvia Ribeiro of RAFI adds, “there were two reasonably strong resolutions when they went in and one very weak proposal when they came out. I think the South has been tricked.”

**“Agroterrorism”**: Civil Society Organizations attending the Biodiversity Convention warned governments Monday that Terminator Technology could be used as a form of biological trade enforcement mechanism. The plant’s suicide sequence can be turned on or off with the application of a chemical like a herbicide or a fertilizer. The suicide trait can remain dormant for several generations and then ‘kick in’ if a routinely used herbicide is withheld. By threatening to halt the export of the chemical, a country like the USA could hold an importing country to ransom and force them to comply with their trade rules. The potential for agroterrorism has suddenly become a hot topic. The June issue of *Scientific American* warned that economic warfare on crops and livestock is both easy and likely. Recently, NATO experts met in Bucharest to discuss the threat and the head of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s research service, Floyd Horn, was quoted in the American press this week as being alarmed by the prospects of “agroterrorism”. The Terminator has a high weapons potential but Dr. Horn’s colleagues in Montreal are trying hard to play down the concern.

“If the Biodiversity Convention lacks the guts to fight GURTS and defend genetic diversity, food security, and national sovereignty, it will lose its credibility as an effective intergovernmental mechanism,” Edward Hammond of RAFI concludes, “We’ll know the answer before the day is over.”

\*\*\*\*\*