

Suicide at the Carnaval? Terminator is back in the Brazilian Congress

Push to Pass Suicide Seeds Legislation Could Come While Deputies Dance

Sign the petition to stop it!

Brazilian civil society organizations warned yesterday that a 2007 bill to end Brazil's ban on Terminator seeds could soon be on the move (again) in the Brazilian Congress. While two bills have been on the congressional agenda for several years, a 2007 bill (PL 268/2007, filed by Rep. Eduardo Sciarra – PSD party) began moving through the Congress last July and came to a head last October. The legalizing of Terminator in Brazil would have global implications, including as a violation of the United Nations moratorium on Terminator technologies, in place since 2000 at the Convention on Biological Diversity.

A campaign mounted by Brazilian social movements stirred a global protest – including a petition signed by over 19,000 people – and temporarily derailed the Bill's passage in October 2013.¹ In response, Décio Lima (PT party), then-President of the Congress's all-important Judiciary Commission (the gatekeeper body that allows bills to proceed to a full congressional vote), vowed not to allow the Bill's passage while he chaired the Commission. But, just before Christmas, the Bill began to move again at the request of more than 30 deputies. A massive write-in campaign, on behalf of concerned organizations, set up by Action Aid (an international advocacy organization with roots in Brazil) again thwarted the move. More than 30,000 people and organizations around the world signed a protest letter calling on the Brazilian government to uphold the UN moratorium on the commercialization of Terminator.² (“Terminator” refers to genetically engineered seed that dies at harvest, obliging farmers to purchase new seed every growing season.)

Brazilian social movements remained concerned that the new session of Congress that began in February would take up the legislation. This week, the Judiciary Commission elected a new President, Rep. Vicente Candido (PT), whom many fear is sympathetic to multinational agribusiness. Cândido Vaccarezza (PT), who filed the second of the two Terminator bills (PL 5575/2009), is on the Commission as well.

Yesterday, sources in the Brazilian Congress warned that the Bill might slip through during a session that could be held during Carnaval next week. Few politicians (or

reporters) will be in Brasilia during the national celebration. If the pro-Terminator Deputies can pull together a quorum in the Commission, the Bill could pass virtually unnoticed until it appears for final vote in Congress sometime thereafter. (The Bill is more likely to be blocked in the Commission than in the full Congress.)

ETC Group's Silvia Ribeiro visited the Brazilian Congress last week and met with the Bill's opponents and with government officials. Until her meetings, Ribeiro and ETC had been hopeful that Brazil's national elections scheduled for October would mean that politicians wouldn't have time to deal with the legislation after it failed in 2013. Now, there are strong rumors (but no evidence) that, for some deputies, passing the Terminator Bill could result in substantial donations from major global seed companies to bolster their election campaigns.

EMBRAPA, the national agricultural research agency (state-owned but with ties and donations from transnational agribusiness companies) has been, de facto, defending the interests of global seed companies in the debate. In December, the president of EMBRAPA wrote a technical note to one of the members of the Commission, stating that, while it doesn't approve the use of Terminator to advance market monopolies, it welcomes the use of Terminator in bio-reactor crops. The Bill would, in theory, allow Terminator only in such crops.

Independent Brazilian scientists and civil society organizations have stated that the "bio-reactor" descriptor can easily include any crop intended for industrial markets, such as sugarcane, maize, soybeans and even trees, and that this argument is only a pretense to overturn the ban and break the international moratorium. Companies will then engineer sterility in all commercial crops.

Pro-Terminator Deputies have been surprised by the scope and depth of world attention given to their legislation. Many of them fear that the ruling party in the Brazilian government (PT), which supported the original anti-Terminator legislation, will be swayed by international concerns that Brazil's move undermines the Convention on Biological Diversity's moratorium on Terminator adopted in 2000 and strengthened at a UN meeting in Brazil in 2006. The scientific advisory body of the Biodiversity Convention meets this June in Montreal. When the full Biodiversity Convention meets in Korea this October, the day after Brazil's elections, the damage could already be done.

Now is the time to let the new members and the newly elected President of the Judiciary Commission that Terminator threatens farmers and food sovereignty. **Please sign the petition below:**

In Portuguese <http://tinyurl.com/l5y4rj7>, In English, <http://tinyurl.com/owrgt8c> or in Spanish <http://goo.gl/KJvVCd>

Note for non-Portuguese speakers: in order to sign to the petition on change.org, you must enter your first name (Nome), last name (Sobrenome), email address, street address (Endereço), city (Cidade), state (Estado), zip code (CEP); tick the first box if you want to

receive mailings from change.org; tick the second box if you want to receive updates on the Terminator issue.

For further information:
www.banterminator.org

Fate of Pro-Terminator Bill Uncertain, ETC Group, 11 Dec. 2013

www.etcgroup.org/content/fate-pro-terminator-bill-uncertain

Brazilian Commission to “Terminate” Seeds This Week, ETC Group, 10 Dec. 2013

<http://www.etcgroup.org/content/brazilian-commission-%E2%80%9Cterminate%E2%80%9D-seeds-week>

Suicide seeds are dead... for the moment, ETC Group, 16 October 2013

<http://www.etcgroup.org/content/good-news-world-food-day-suicide-seeds-are-dead%E2%80%A6for-moment>

Brazil Set to Unleash Terminator Threat, ETC Group, 7 October 2013

<http://www.etcgroup.org/content/brazil-set-unleash-terminator-threat>

For more information:

Silvia Ribeiro, ETC Group Latin America Director, silvia@etcgroup.org

Tel +52-55-5563-2664

Pat Mooney, ETC Group Executive Director, etc@etcgroup.org

Tel: +1-613-241-2267

Kathy Jo Wetter, ETC Group Research Director, kjo@etcgroup.org

Tel: +1-919-688-7302

¹ See ETC Group, “Good News for World Food Day: Suicide Seeds Are Dead...for the moment,” 16 October 2013: <http://www.etcgroup.org/content/good-news-world-food-day-suicide-seeds-are-dead%E2%80%A6for-moment>

² <http://www.change.org/pt-BR/peti%C3%A7%C3%B5es/the-comission-of-constitution-and-justice-of-the-brazilian-deputy-chamber-no-to-terminator-no-to-suicide-seeds-against-the-bill-268-2007>