

Ban Terminator

www.BanTerminator.org

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Monsanto May Commercialize Terminator Biotech Giant Revises Pledge on Sterile Seed Technology as Global Alliance Calls for a Ban.

Monsanto, the world's largest seed and agbiotech company, made a public promise in 1999 not to commercialize 'Terminator Technology' – plants that are genetically engineered to produce sterile seeds. Now Monsanto says it may develop or use the so-called 'suicide seeds' after all. The revised pledge from Monsanto now suggests that it would use Terminator seeds in non-food crops and does not rule out other uses of Terminator in the future. (1) Monsanto's modified stance comes to light as the biotech and seed industry confront peasant and farmer movements, Indigenous peoples and their allies in an escalating battle at the United Nations over the future of Terminator.

In 2000 the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted a *de facto* moratorium on sterile seed technologies, also known as Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (GURTs). But at next month's high-level meeting of the CBD in Curitiba, Brazil (20-31 March 2006) the biotechnology industry will intensify its push to undermine the six-year old *de facto* moratorium.

In response, over 300 organizations today declared their support for a global ban on Terminator Technology, asserting that sterile seeds threaten biodiversity and will destroy the livelihoods and cultures of the 1.4 billion people who depend on farm-saved seed.

"The world's farmers and Indigenous peoples cannot trust Monsanto," said Alejandro Argumedo from Asociación ANDES - Potato Park in Cusco, Peru "Monsanto's broken promise is a deadly betrayal because Indigenous peoples and farmers depend on seed saving for food security and self-determination."

Terminator technology was first developed by the United States Department of Agriculture and US seed company Delta & Pine Land to prevent farmers from saving and re-using harvested seed, forcing them to buy new seeds each season. (2)

In October 1999, in response to worldwide opposition, Monsanto publicly pledged not to commercialize Terminator seeds. Then-CEO, Robert Shapiro, wrote an open letter to the Rockefeller Foundation, stating, "I am writing to let you know that we are making a public commitment not to commercialize sterile seed technologies, such as the one dubbed 'Terminator.'"

Now, Monsanto has revised its commitment, pledging to keep Terminator only out of food crops – opening the door to the use of Terminator in cotton, tobacco, pharmaceutical crops and grass with sterility genes. Referring to new versions of GURTs, Monsanto's

'pledge' now says, "Monsanto does not rule out the potential development and use of one of these technologies in the future. The company will continue to study the risks and benefits of this technology on a case-by-case basis."

"Monsanto's revised pledge resonates closely with the actions of a few rich governments that have been promoting Terminator at the UN recently," points out Chee Yoke Ling of Third World Network. "It looks like Monsanto and other corporations are behind the strategy to unleash Terminator at the upcoming meetings of the CBD".

Monsanto's new stance on Terminator is part of an industry-wide attempt to undermine the *de facto* moratorium. In the past year, government delegates from Canada, Australia and New Zealand, working hand in hand with the biotech industry, have used UN meetings to introduce new text that will be considered at next month's CBD meeting in Brazil. (3) This text recommends Terminator technologies be approached on a "case by case risk assessment" basis – echoing the language of Monsanto's new 'pledge.' The intention behind the 'case by case' approach is to regulate Terminator just like any other genetically modified crop. This would ignore the uniquely devastating societal impacts of genetic seed sterility.

"Terminator is a direct assault on farmers, Indigenous cultures and on the food sovereignty and well-being of all rural people, primarily the very poorest," said Chukki Nanjundaswamy of India from La Via Campesina, an organization representing tens of millions of peasant farmers worldwide. "If Monsanto bullies the UN into allowing 'case by case' assessment of Terminator, it means farmers will be carried off the land coffin by coffin."

"These companies have a clear and simple vision that nothing should be grown without a license from Monsanto and a few other masters of sterility and reproduction," explains Benny Haerlin of Greenpeace International. "They pursue this strategy step by step or 'case by case' as they now call it. If governments at the CBD give in to Monsanto and erode the Terminator moratorium we will all have to pay the bill tomorrow and the collateral damage will be the integrity and fertility of nature."

The Ban Terminator campaign today announces the names of over 300 organizations worldwide that are demanding a ban on Terminator technology. The list of organizations is available at <http://www.banterminator.org/endorsements> These organizations are from every region of the world and include peasant farmer movements and farm organizations, Indigenous peoples organizations, civil society and environmental groups, unions, faith communities, international development organizations, women's movements, consumer organizations and youth networks.

"We are particularly alarmed that Monsanto's edited pledge no longer rejects commercialization of this dangerous technology." said Lucy Sharratt of the international Ban Terminator Campaign. "We are calling on national governments to dismiss Monsanto's tactic in favour of an all-out ban on Terminator. We invite all civil society and social movements to join with us for the battle against Terminator next month in Brazil."

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Notes to editors:

1. Monsanto's new pledge on Terminator and GURTs is online at <http://www.monsanto.com/monsanto/content/media/pubs/2005/pledgereport.pdf>. A full copy of their new and old pledges is available at www.banterminator.org
2. Delta and Pine Land refer to Terminator as Technology Protection System (TPS). Terminator is currently being tested in greenhouses and Delta and Pine Land vowed to commercialize it within the next few years.
3. In February 2005 at a meeting of the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Assessment (SBSTTA) in Bangkok, Canadian government delegates made a surprise attempt to overturn the moratorium by allowing Terminator to be field tested and commercialized. Last month, at another preparatory meeting in Granada, Spain (known as the Working Group on 8j), the Australian government, coached by a US State Department representative, also attacked the moratorium. See ETC Group news release on 27th January 2006: "Granada's Grim Sowers Plow up the moratorium on Terminator" available at <http://www.etcgroup.org/article.asp?newsid=542>