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Granada's Grim Sowers Plow up Moratorium on Terminator, Clear the Path for its Approval at UN

*Terminator Opponents Prepare for Battle
at COP8 in Curitiba, Brazil March 20-31, 2006*

Indigenous peoples were betrayed and Farmers' Rights trampled at a UN meeting this week when the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian governments – guided by the US government and a brazen cabal of corporate Gene Giants – took a major step to undermine the existing moratorium on Terminator technology (i.e., plants that are genetically modified to produce sterile seeds at harvest). The damaging recommendations from the meeting in Granada, Spain, now go to the upcoming 8th biennial meeting of the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Curitiba, Brazil, March 20-31.

The CBD's "Working Group on Article 8(j)" that met in Granada this week was established to protect the traditional knowledge, innovation and practices of Indigenous peoples and peasant farmers. Civil society groups and Indigenous peoples watched in disbelief however as governments ignored the profoundly negative social, economic and environmental impacts of "suicide seeds" highlighted in numerous CBD studies as well as in official submissions from Indigenous peoples and farmers' organizations. The outcome now threatens biodiversity and the future of seed-saving and locally adapted agriculture worldwide.

"Terminator poses a threat to our welfare and food sovereignty and constitutes a violation of our human right of self-determination," said Mariano Marcos Terena of Brazil on behalf of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity.

Although the meeting "reaffirmed" the fragile UN moratorium on Terminator, new recommendations adopted in Granada now may be used to block the CBD's precautionary approach when governments meet in March in Brazil. Not only did the meeting fail to condemn Terminator as immoral and anti-farmer, Australia and the United States falsely claimed that Terminator, which creates sterility, would "increase productivity."

With a US government official consulting at her side, the Australian negotiator insisted on deleting reference to the "precautionary approach" and used this as a bargaining chip to win controversial wording for a "case-by-case risk assessment" of Terminator. "The new reference to case-by-case assessment is shocking and extremely damaging because it suggests that national

regulatory review of Terminator is possible – it undermines the CBD moratorium, opening the door to Terminator approval,” warns Hope Shand of ETC Group.

“Australia’s brazen move confirms that an alarming government-industry strategy is in play to overturn the UN moratorium on Terminator,” said Lucy Sharratt of the Ban Terminator Campaign. “The process and outcome dismiss the contributions of Indigenous peoples and local communities.”

Despite the unscrupulous push by a handful of rich countries to put industry profits before Farmers’ Rights, the majority of governments at the meeting remain solidly opposed to Terminator technology and committed to the existing moratorium. In her welcoming address the Spanish Minister of the Environment acknowledged the dangers of Terminator technology. During the meeting, the African Group, Egypt and the Philippines made impassioned speeches about the potentially devastating impacts of Terminator on biodiversity and food security and the need for national bans. Norway, Pakistan, Kenya and the European Union defended the existing moratorium. India and Brazil both referred to their national laws prohibiting genetic seed sterilization technology. Despite this strong opposition to Terminator, Australia’s extreme position and its determination to block consensus left governments little room to negotiate.

In the Halls of Shame: Despite public pledges not to develop Terminator technology, Gene Giants Syngenta and Monsanto lobbied aggressively on Terminator throughout the week. Harry Collins of Delta and Pine Land, the world’s largest cotton seed company which is now testing Terminator plants in greenhouses, attended under the auspices of the International Seed Federation. Monsanto’s Roger Krueger moonlighted as a representative from the International Chamber of Commerce. They were joined in the corridors by CropLife International, a pesticide lobby group representing the “plant science industry.”

Outside the UN meeting Spanish people of all ages gathered to remind governments of the strong public resistance to Terminator technology. Ecologistas en Acción organized public events, street protests, and educational street displays throughout the week as part of the International Ban Terminator Campaign (www.banterminator.org). When news of the Granada outcome reached the plenary of the World Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela last night there were roars of anger from thousands of assembled farmers.

“Allowing case-by-case approval of Terminator means a slow death for farmers coffin-by-coffin,” explained Silvia Ribeiro of ETC Group speaking in Caracas.

The Ban Terminator Campaign will work with groups and movements across the world to strengthen the global resistance to stop Terminator. The fight now moves to the COP8 meeting in Brazil March 20-31.

A transcript of the Draft Recommendation submitted by the Working Group can be read on ETC Group’s web site at: <http://www.etcgroup.org/article.asp?newsid=541>

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