

## **Ethiopian Civil Society Statement**

### **On the unnecessary and illegal rush to introduce genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into the country's agricultural system without proper institutional and regulatory mechanisms set up and a proper public consultation**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) produced a report on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 titled Agricultural Biotechnology Annual Report (ET2019-0010). The report says that the Ethiopian government has approved the commercialization of Bt Cotton and the Confined Field Trial (CFT) of Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA). The planting of Bt Cotton has resulted in hundreds of thousands of suicides in India and has failed in Burkina Faso and South Africa. WEMA is Monsanto's GM drought tolerant maize and has failed in Southern Africa and was rejected by the South African government.

Ethiopia is the center of origin and diversity of many important food and fiber crops and has one of the most diverse food systems in the world. This diversity in food and agriculture is the result of thousands of years of careful cultivation and management by the small-scale food producers of Ethiopia. There is very little to prove that, over a long term, GMOs increase productivity, decrease the usage of agrochemicals or tackle environmental challenges. In fact, there is a mountain of evidence that they increase health risk, are nutritionally poor and damage the environment. It is therefore quite concerning that there is a test being done on Enset, a critical crop for over 20 million people in Ethiopia. This will compromise the health and resilience of present and future generations.

GMOs are pushed in Ethiopia by corporate interests in the absence of rigorous, independent impact assessments and proper biosafety protocols. The push of GMOs in Ethiopia is emblematic of regulatory capture, whereby a government agency charged with regulating in the public interest promotes instead the interest of private industry.

The institutions that are set up to protect us from risks arising out of the planting and use of GMOs are not equipped to protect the health of the people and the environment. The institution that is responsible to ensure the implementation of the Biosafety Proclamation (No. 896/2015), the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Commission under the Office of the Prime Minister, is understaffed and has low political clout to protect the interest of citizens. Ethiopia has a law on Food, Medicine and Health Care Administration and Control (Proclamation No. 661/2009) but lacks policy for GM foods unlike many other countries. Ethiopia is a member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a UN body that is open to all members of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). But there is lack of well-equipped National Referral Laboratory for the detection of GMOs and products.

Therefore, we ask the Ethiopian government to:

1. Institute a moratorium, of no less than five years, on any GMO field trials and any commercial planting until the proper institutional and regulatory mechanisms are set up, and a proper public consultation process has been held.
2. Ensure an immediate public consultation on whether Ethiopia should accept GMOs as part of its agriculture systems;
3. Respect its commitment to the Cartagena Protocol and put stringent regulations to protect our biodiversity and human health;
4. Stop the tampering by GMO enthusiasts on the diverse food plants and animals of Ethiopia, which are the basis of our resilience, identity and future;
5. Build the capacity of the institutions that are set up to protect the health of the people and the environment;

6. Setup a free participatory and transparent mechanism of assessing the products which are the results of genetic modification.

Signatories:

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4. Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD)
5. Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (Melca) Ethiopia
6. Best Practice Association (BPA)
7. Partnership for OVC (POVC) Ethiopia
8. Voice of Wilderness Developmental Organization (VWDO)
9. Assosa Environmental Protection Association (AEPA)
10. Meseret Humanitarian Organization
11. Rift Valley Initiative for Rural Advancement (RIRA)

Co-signatories:

1. African Biodiversity Network (ABN)
2. African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB)
3. Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)
4. Association Ouest Africaine pour le Développement de la Pêche Artisanale (ADEPA)
5. Biodiversity and Biosafety Coalition of Kenya (BIBA)
6. Coalition pour la Protection du Patrimoine Génétique Africaine (COPAGEN)
7. Comité Ouest Africain de Semences Paysannes (COASP)
8. Community Alliance for Global Justice (CAGJ)
9. Comparing and Supporting Endogenous Development (COMPAS Africa)
10. Eastern and Southern Africa Pastoralist Network (ESAPN)
11. Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF)
12. Fahamu Africa
13. Faith & Justice Network of the Mano River Basin (FJN)
14. Farm-Saved Seeds Network (FASSNET)
15. Fédération Agroécologique du Bénin (FAEB)
16. Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in West Africa (FECCIWA)
17. Friends of the Earth Africa (FoEA)
18. Global Justice Now!
19. Groundswell West Africa (GWA)
20. Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)
21. Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC)
22. Institut Africain pour le Développement Economique et Social (INADES-Formation)
23. Institut Panafricain pour la Citoyenneté, les Consommateurs et le Développement (CICODEV Africa)
24. International Tree Foundation
25. Jeunes Volontaires pour l'Environnement (JVE International)
26. John Wilson
27. La Via Campesina SEA
28. Network of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organizations of West Africa (ROPPA)
29. Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Association
30. Plate-forme Régionale des Organisations Paysannes d'Afrique Centrale (PROPAC)

31. Regional Schools and Colleges Permaculture Programme (ReSCOPE)
32. Réseau Africain pour le Droit à l'Alimentation (RAPDA –Togo)
33. Rural Women's Assembly (RWA)
34. Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)
35. Tanzanian Alliance for Biodiversity (TABIO)
36. Thousand Currents (formerly IDEX)
37. Union Africaine des Consommateurs (UAC)
38. We are the Solution (WAS)
39. World Neighbors
40. Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB)