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Diversity not Monocultures: Alternative Summit on Food and Agriculture calls for a Halt to Genetic Engineering and Agrofuel Development

Bonn May 16, 2008

The 700 participants from more than 100 countries who attended the international "Planet Diversity" congress closed the event by demanding an international moratorium on the production of 'agrofuels' and the use of genetically engineered crops. They called for a revolution in agriculture oriented towards the survival of and respect for all peoples, animals and plants. The combined climate and biodiversity catastrophes demand a common, radical paradigm change among farmers, consumers, scientists and governments. The current food crisis, despite agricultural surpluses, is a political scandal.

The goal of the international network emerging from "Planet Diversity" is to deliberate on common values and a wholistic revolution in agriculture and food consumption. Businesses should be won over through critical and precautionary, practical progress.

„The monocultures of the past decades no longer contribute to the production of more and better food. They do not feed the world's poor, but instead fill the meat factories and cars of the rich. They damage the climate, exhaust the soil, lead to the burning of forests, waste and poison our limited water and drive small farmers and indigenous peoples from their land," summed up conference organizer Benedikt Haerlin. "Industrial agriculture is a fossil of the past that threatens to destroy our natural and cultural diversity and with it our ability to survive."

The farmer and grassroots groups of "Planet Diversity" see this interpretation confirmed by the recent report from 400 scientists and experts of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD). Its co-president Hans Herren told the conference that "business as usual is simply not an option anymore," and stressed that: "the means and technologies to overcome hunger are available. What is missing is the political will to apply them intelligently and systematically."

This call of alarm from the world body should not be ignored for years like the first report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), demanded Indian seed and environmental activist Vandana Shiva. World trade and speculation with agricultural raw materials have created the situation where despite increasing production, the number of hungry will swell to a billion people. "We farmers can produce enough food for the populations of today and tomorrow when we are not forced into de-

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VDW (Vereinigung Deutscher
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pendence on multinational trade, chemical and gene technology corporations and robbed of our natural means of production,” said farmer leader Mamadou Goita from Mali.

Seeds, the basis of all agriculture, are not the private property of Monsanto, Syngenta and Bayer, but are rather the common inheritance of humanity. „The right to trade, plant, further develop and sell seeds should be the basis for an agriculture in service to humanity, instead of profits,” said Guy Kastler of the Network for Rural Seeds in France. Hunger and climate change can only be overcome if we bring diversity back into the fields instead of locking it up in gene banks.

The disappointing results of the negotiations on an international liability law in the framework of the Biosafety Protocol show how little the genetic engineering firms trust their own safety measures. Angela von Beesten from the German section of the International Society of Doctors for the Environment, who led a workshop on the health risks of genetic engineering, pointed out that independent research and health assessment are practically impossible because of secrecy.

“Diversity not monocultures,” also stands for the participants of “Planet Diversity” as a new ethical consciousness: “We are a part, and not the rulers of, nature,” reads their Bonn Manifesto.

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