



ETC Group
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Suicide Seeds – Bombshell in Bangkok

*Canadian-Led Coup to Allow Terminator Technology
Narrowly Squelched at UN Meeting*

Percy Schmeiser, a Canadian farmer who was sued by Monsanto, spoke today at a UN meeting in Bangkok – harshly criticizing his governments’ efforts to promote field-testing and commercialization of Terminator seeds (plants genetically-modified to render seeds sterile at harvest time).

“The Canadian government has acted shamefully. It is supporting a dangerous, anti-farmer technology that aims to eliminate the rights of farmers to save and re-use harvested seed,” said Schmeiser. “Instead of representing the good will of the Canadian people or attending to the best interests of the Biodiversity Treaty, the Canadian government is fronting for the multinational gene giants who stand to win enormous profits from the release of Terminator seeds around the world.”

Schmeiser is the 74-year old Canadian farmer who was sued by Monsanto for patent infringement when the company’s patented, genetically modified canola seed invaded his farm – unwanted and unwelcome. A victim of genetic pollution and a champion of Farmers’ Rights, Schmeiser courageously fought Monsanto all the way to the Canadian Supreme Court.

A Canadian government proposal to unleash Terminator was leaked to the ETC Group on the first day of a UN meeting in Bangkok, February 7-11 (SBSTTA, the scientific advisory body to the Convention on Biological Diversity – CBD). The news stunned farmers’ organizations, government delegations, and civil society worldwide. Ottawa’s instructions to the Canadian delegation in Bangkok called for an all-out push for field-testing and commercialisation of sterile seed technologies, effectively un-doing the precautionary, *de facto* moratorium on Terminator seeds adopted by governments in 1998. Even worse, the Canadian delegation was instructed to “block consensus” by governments attending the meeting if it didn’t get its way. ETC Group has also learned that, in advance of the Bangkok meeting, Canadian embassies around the world asked governments to support a recommendation for “field testing and commercial use” of Terminator. Canada’s blatant promotion of an anti-South technology does not bode well for the G8 meeting of world leaders in July in Scotland where Canada will propose to introduce nanotechnology on the G-8 agenda.

After being swamped this week by protest emails and letters, the Canadian government was forced to soften its public position on Terminator, but it continued to press a solidly pro-Terminator view in the corridors and in a committee appointed to negotiate draft text on Terminator. (The drafting group on Terminator included representatives from Canada, the

European Community, Peru, Tanzania, and the Philippines.) By Thursday morning Canada and its seed industry allies had drafted text that included language promoting Terminator field trials, capacity building for the use of Terminator in the developing world and specifically invited the research participation of “private sector entities.”

“The draft text on Terminator released Thursday morning was appalling – it looked like it was written by the multinational seed industry,” said Jim Thomas of ETC Group, speaking from Bangkok. “It strongly reflected the Canadian government’s pro-Terminator position as revealed earlier this week in the leaked document.”

Suicide Seed Squad: Canada hasn’t been working alone in Bangkok. The UN meeting was crawling with representatives from the biotech industry and related trade groups – including Monsanto, Delta & Pine Land, Crop Life International, PHARMA (pharmaceutical manufacturers), the International Seed Federation and more – who lobbied against current restrictions on the development of suicide seeds. New Zealand and Australia also backed the position of industry and Canada, while a fleet of US government representatives observed from the sidelines. (The US government is not a Party to the Biodiversity Convention.)

Thankfully, disaster was averted due to key interventions by the governments of Norway, Sweden, Austria, the European Community, Cuba, Peru and Liberia, on behalf of the African Group.

The good news is that these governments managed to delete the most offensive wording. The final text and recommendations reaffirm earlier decisions, amounting to a continuing, but fragile, *de facto* moratorium on Terminator. The issue now bounces to another CBD advisory body (the Working Group on 8(j)) in March 2006.

Interminable Terminator? The bad news is that decisions made in Bangkok will allow the issue of Terminator to be re-examined and re-studied interminably. In ETC Group’s view, the CBD continues to dilly-dally and delay decisions on Terminator while the industry is moving full-speed ahead to bring sterile seeds to market.

“The international community needs to know that Terminator technology is a real and present danger. The biotech industry is chomping on the bit to commercialize suicide seeds. Nothing short of an all-out ban on Terminator will stop it from being unleashed in farmer’s fields,” said Hope Shand of ETC Group.

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Note to Editors:

Terminator technology was first developed by the US Department of Agriculture and the multinational seed industry to prevent farmers from replanting saved seed. When it came to

public light in 1998 massive public opposition forced Monsanto and Syngenta to disavow the technology.

SBSTTA is the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, a body that advises the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. www.biodiv.org

The United Nations refers to Terminator seed technology as GURTs (genetic use restriction technology).

For more information on Percy Schmeiser's court case, see: www.percyschmeiser.com

The Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration, formerly RAFI, is an international civil society organization headquartered in Canada. The ETC group is dedicated to the advancement of cultural and ecological diversity and human rights. www.etcgroup.org. The ETC group is also a member of the Community Biodiversity Development and Conservation Programme (CBDC). The CBDC is a collaborative experimental initiative involving civil society organizations and public research institutions in 14 countries. The CBDC is dedicated to the exploration of community-directed programmes to strengthen the conservation and enhancement of agricultural biodiversity. The CBDC website is www.cbdcprogram.org