



ETC Group
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Canadian Government to Unleash Terminator Bombshell at UN Meeting: All-out push for commercialisation of Sterile Seed Technology

A confidential document leaked today to ETC Group reveals that the Canadian government, at a United Nations meeting in Bangkok (Feb. 7-11), will attempt to overturn an international moratorium on genetic seed sterilisation technology (known universally as Terminator). Even worse, the Canadian government has instructed its negotiators to “block consensus” on any other option.

“Canada is about to launch a devastating kick in the stomach to the world’s most vulnerable farmers – the 1.4 billion people who depend on farm saved seed,” said ETC Group Executive Director Pat Mooney speaking from Ottawa. “The Canadian government is doing the dirty work for the multinational gene giants and the US government. Even Monsanto wasn’t prepared to be this upfront and nasty. Canada is betraying Farmers’ Rights and food sovereignty everywhere.”

Terminator technology was first developed by the US government and the seed industry to prevent farmers from re-planting saved seed and is considered the most controversial and immoral agricultural application of genetic engineering so far. When first made public in 1998, “suicide seeds” triggered an avalanche of public opposition, forcing Monsanto to abandon the technology and prompting the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to impose a *de facto* moratorium on its further development. According to the leaked instructions to Canadian negotiators at SBSTTA 10 (a scientific advisory body to the CBD), Canada will insist on Wednesday (9 Feb.) that governments accept the field testing and commercialization of Terminator varieties (referred to as GURTS – Genetic Use Restriction Technologies). Canada will also attack an official UN report, prepared by an international expert group, which is critical of the potential impacts of Terminator seeds on small farmers and Indigenous Peoples. In stark contrast to Canada’s position, the expert report recommends that governments seek prohibitions on the technology.

In Bangkok, civil society and Indigenous Peoples are calling on the Canadian government to abandon its endorsement of Terminator and to join with other governments to prohibit the technology once and for all. Many African and Asian governments have called for Terminator to be banned and the European Union has also been supportive of the existing moratorium.

“It is outrageous that Canada is backing an anti-farmer technology and shameful that it will ‘block consensus’ on any other outcome. Governments from around the world must not accept this bullying tactic,” says ETC Group’s Hope Shand from the negotiations in Bangkok. “If Canada blocks decision-making on this issue, the moratorium will be in jeopardy and terminator seeds will be commercialized, ending up in the fields of small farmers.”

The full leaked text of the Canadian government’s instructions to its negotiators on Terminator/GURTS follows.

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“Advice on the report of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (GURTS);

Canada has major reservations regarding the recommendations in the AHTEG report. Canada notes that the experts were unable to reach consensus and that while this is recognized in para. 15 of the report, this should have been made clear in the recommendation section of the report. Unfortunately, the report leaves the impression that consensus was achieved on all of the recommendations when this was clearly not case and in particular in terms of recommendation (b) which reads as follows, “In view of the current lack of data, recommends that Parties and other Governments consider the development of regulatory frameworks not to approve GURT’s for field-testing and commercial use.”

Canada will suggest that the document clearly indicate in the Annex that there is no consensus on for the recommendations. Alternatively, the AHTEG report can be referred to as the “Chairs’ report”. Canada also believes that the AHTEG report contains scientific inaccuracies and a lack of balance in terms of reflecting both potential positive and negative impacts of this technology, and these issues should be addressed before the report is further distributed. We believe that it would be beneficial for Parties and other governments to submit comments to the Executive Secretary/CHM to represent national

views to improve the accuracy of the document, and that these be made available to both the 8j working group and COP.

Additionally, Canada will propose that SBSTTA adopt a recommendation for decision at COP8 based on the revised wording of recommendation “b” below and will propose this recommendation be incorporated for consideration at the 8j meeting:

NEW WORDING for recommendation b) of AHTEG report

(b) In view of the current lack of data, recommend that Parties and other Governments consider the development of domestic regulatory frameworks TO ALLOW FOR THE EVALUATION OF NOVEL VARIETIES, INCLUDING THOSE WITH GURTS, FOR FIELD TESTING AND COMMERCIAL USE BASED ON APPROPRIATE SCIENCE-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL RISK/SAFETY ASSESSMENTS.

In Canada's opinion the revised wording we are suggesting, strengthens the recommendation and provides for a strong scientific assessment of risk.

If we are unsuccessful in obtaining these additions (indication that recommendations in the AHTEG report were not based on consensus OR agreement to have national views submitted) AND changes to recommendation “B” – or any other outcome which clearly addresses our concern over a defacto moratorium on GURTS – Canada is prepared to block consensus on this issue.”

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