

YVAPURUVU DECLARATION

Seed laws – resisting dispossession

Seeds are the work of peoples and a part of their history. They have been created through collective work, creativity, experimentation, and stewardship. Seeds in turn have shaped peoples, making possible their specific and diverse ways of growing crops and feeding themselves, and allowing them to share and develop their world views. Seeds are therefore intimately linked to community standards, responsibilities, obligations, and rights. Seeds place responsibilities on us that precede our right to use them.

Seeds are the fundamental basis of sustenance. If today, all over the world, we are fed by agriculture, enjoying the flavours and variety of food – if agriculture sustains all of humanity – it is because peoples have stewarded seeds, carried them along on their journeys, and enabled them to circulate. And now seeds, the basis of our sustenance and our existence, are under attack. The purpose of this attack is to put an end to peasant and indigenous agriculture, and especially to independent food production. It is an attempt



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to foreclose the future of food sovereignty, turning us into a landless population, expelled from our territories, whose only option is to become cheap, dependent labour. It is an attack mounted in various forms and via a range of mechanisms. We must challenge it on every front.

The highest profile aspect of the attack on seeds and all they represent is that of intellectual property. Most commonly this takes the form of what are now called plant breeders' rights or "UPOV laws" but it also includes certification laws, varietal registration, and marketing laws. These are laws and regulations that legalise abuse and dispossession.

Specifically:

- 1 They allow companies to appropriate peasant seeds.
- 2 They prohibit and criminalise the use, saving, handling, exchange, and reproduction of peasant seeds.
- 3 They allow for the confiscation and destruction of our seeds, crops, and harvests.
- 4 They force us to accept incursions into our land, storehouses, and homes, sometimes with military intervention.
- 5 They provide for fines and jail terms through legal proceedings that do not even afford us a proper defence, since they presume our guilt.

These laws prevent seeds from traveling and evolving with people. They freeze seeds in time, so that they cannot be transformed and adapted to new environments and territories. They condemn our seeds to death.

This privatisation and pillage is supported by other provisions now being imposed on us, including food safety standards; grower and ecosystem certification standards; the misnamed "good agricultural practices"; the latest roll-outs of the "green revolution"; agrochemical packages; phytosanitary standards; environmental services programs; agricultural development and financing programs; the introduction of new technologies, especially transgenics, with the looming threat of Terminator crops; integrated production arrangements; contract growing; land use and territorial management plans; associations with big capital, and more.

Corporations, governments, and international agencies have used a series of myths and lies to justify these laws. The first and most shameful is that these laws will give us access to higher-quality industrial seeds. This ignores ample evidence that peasant seeds are best adapted to actual growing conditions and provide for stable, diverse production of sufficient quantities. It also ignores the fact that far from guaranteeing quality, privatisation laws give corporations the power to tie us down to toxic, unreliable seeds.

In reality, this is a war on peoples' sustenance. They want to weaken our capacity to resist. They want us to give up our livelihoods, our lands and our territories, leaving the field free for them to take over our ecosystems, install urban and toxic waste dumps, take possession of our water sources and agrifood system, and expand agribusiness extractivism, agrofuels, mining, deforestation, tree monocultures, dams, tourism, and the occupation of the countryside as the exclusive preserve of the powerful classes.

In the face of these threats, the rural peoples of the world have the duty and the collective and historic right to regain, strengthen and maintain the stewardship of our seeds, our ways of

life, and our methods of production. It is a responsibility we have very much already taken on: popular campaigns are springing up all across the continent, and the defence of seeds in the hands of peoples is central to many of them. Today, our organisations and our seeds are fighting off the dispossession that results from all forms of intellectual property or other privatisation methods. We will continue to take care of our seeds. We will continue to exchange seeds and knowledge. We will continue to plant our seeds and to teach new generations how to grow them and keep them alive. We will continue to build food sovereignty and to resist agribusiness, along with the whole culture of homogenisation, privatisation, and death that it is trying to impose. We will fight until seed privatisation laws in all their guises have disappeared, leaving only a bad memory. It is important for this resistance to continue to broaden and proliferate; we will use various methods of awareness raising and consensus building so as to bring the broadest possible range of sectors into our struggle: because the defence of seeds, and of peasant and indigenous agriculture, is the defence of food and the future of humanity.

In addition to reaffirming our commitments, we greet with joy and pride the many different campaigns being unfurled in our region: the broad mobilisation in Mexico to defend maize against the invasion of GMOs and the criminalisation of seeds; the Honduran land recovery movement; the Costa Rican campaign that has led to 77% of the country's municipalities being declared GMO-free; the farmers' strike, the quashing of UPOV 91 by the Constitutional Court, and the resistance against seed confiscation in Colombia; the wide-ranging mobilisation against UPOV laws in Chile and Argentina; the mobilisations against agribusiness and soybeans in Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Argentina, including the blockade of the Monsanto plant in the Malvinas Argentinas district of the city of Córdoba by local residents and members of the Mothers of Ituzaingó; and the demand in Uruguay that the competent authorities take the measures necessary to prevent native maize from being contaminated with GMOs. At the same time we salute the years of campaign and struggle against UPOV that have taken place in Costa Rica since 1999, especially during the resistance to the FTA with the United States (2004-2008).

We repudiate attempts by the Brazilian congress to approve the use of genetic use restriction technologies (GURTs), popularly known as Terminator technologies, because of the risks they pose to biodiversity and food sovereignty and because of the violation of indigenous peoples' and peasants' rights that they represent. If Brazil were to go in this direction, it would be unilaterally violating a UN agreement and opening the doors for other countries to be pressured into releasing this technology.

Noting with consternation the situation in Paraguay, where agribusiness has demonstrated its capacity for destruction and domination, we stand in solidarity with the struggle and resistance of the Paraguayan peoples; we commit to accompanying them on their path and to bringing their voices and their example to every corner of our own territories.

We wage our struggle today in an environment that has been depoliticised from the corridors of power on down, in which scorn for all that is rural, peasant, or indigenous holds sway; an environment that ignores the knowledge and contributions of rural peoples and communities while presenting big capital, globalisation, and agribusiness as the only alternatives. For this reason, many of the proposed solutions render us invisible and destroy or ignore the unbreakable bonds between peoples, communities, and seeds, the only real basis of any

effective possibility of protecting them and safeguarding their future. We cannot let it be forgotten that the stewardship of seeds is one of humanity's oldest strategies, without which the future is in jeopardy. Seeds are the heritage of peoples; the two have evolved together and are not isolated entities floating in a social void. Seeds are not things, nor are they merchandise or computer programs. They cannot remain in circulation without the stewardship and care of peoples and communities. They are not a resource waiting to be grabbed by the first to come upon them. In other words, there is no such thing as seeds that are free in the abstract. They are free thanks to the peoples and communities who defend, maintain and care for them so that we can enjoy the goods they provide.

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