

Conference on Just Governance:

The Nigerian Biosafety Act and Genetically Modified Organisms Implications for Nigerians and Africa

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ADVOCACY

MISSION STATEMENT

The Africa Faith and Justice Network, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, seeks to educate and advocate for just relations with Africa and to work in partnership with African peoples as they engage in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Moved to action by their personal experiences in Africa, three Catholic missionary congregations namely the Missionaries of Africa, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritains), and the Society of African Missions, founded the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in 1983 to transform United States policy towards Africa and her people. Since that time, membership has grown and remains committed in faith to advocate in Washington, DC for U.S. relations with Africa that foster justice and peace, and to educate the public across the United States on the truth about Africa.

ABUJA DECLARATION ON THE RELEASE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOs) IN NIGERIA

At the conclusion of the conference on **Just Governance: The Nigerian Bio-Safety Law, GMOs, and Implications for Nigeria and Africa held at Reiz Continental Hotel, Abuja, May 23-25, 2016**; we, the participants from diverse religious and faith based bodies, communities and civil society organizations (CSOs) from Nigeria, Africa and other parts of the world, affirm that organic foods are healthy, nutritious and remain a vital aspect of human rights to food and food security.

Informed by the robust, structured and eye-opening presentations by specialists and panelists and spontaneous contributions by the participants, we strongly object to the release of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in Nigeria, convinced that GMOs are not the solution to hunger.

Nigeria's fertile land guarantees the nation food sovereignty. Consequently, hunger is due to bad governance, poor infrastructure for preservation and distribution of food and lack of adequate all round support to small holder farmers who constitute over 70% of the farmers in Nigeria. We, therefore, stornly recommend to the Nigerian Government to invest more in agriculture.

The Nigerian Bio-Safety Law, in its present form, is a recipe for the destruction of Nigeria's ecosystem, food cultures and systems. The process leading to its passage was devoid of critical input and public participation that would have enabled Nigerians to significantly determine and protect their food cultures and systems. It lacks legal safeguards for protecting their rights.

We observe that the public hearing at the National Assembly did not meet an acceptable, minimum, global standard and best practices in a democratic society. The hearing was just a formality to create the semblance of a democratic process and skewed in favour of the GMOs Trans-National Corporations. The Government should not only introduce appropriate mechanisms but repeal the laws seeking to legalise and adopt GMO seedlings and food products and consequently marginalize Nigerian farmers.

Furthermore, the Nigerian Bio-Safety Law is not in the interest of Nigerian farmers and the wider public because it facilitates the introduction of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) on a massive scale that violates the **precautionary principle**, which forms the basis of the African Union's revised African Model Law

on Biodiversity, to which Nigeria is a signatory.

We adopt the comments of Health of Mother Earth Foundation and Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria on the relevant sections of the Bio-Safety Law and strongly suggest their incorporation into the Nigerian Law to safeguard the rights of Nigerian citizens and protect Nigeria's ecosystem.

The potential socio-economic, cultural and ethical impacts of GMOs are enormous and diminish the positive impacts of small holder farmers who are feeding the country; promoting cultural practices, community well-being, traditional crops and varieties; reducing rural unemployment; engendering trade; raising the quality of life of indigenous peoples; and re-affirming food security.

Aware that the UN recognizes socio-economic consideration as a key element in biosafety negotiations and decision-making processes (*Protocol on Socio-Economic Considerations; Article 26*), we, therefore, appeal to the Federal Government to conduct a socio-economic impact assessment of GMOs before the Government takes measures that destroy Nigeria's agricultural sector.

The concern about Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) is not only about safety for consumers, we are equally concerned about the more damaging systematic appropriation of the rights to seeds by the Trans-National Corporations that deprives farmers of their traditional rights to seeds, in favor of patents by multinational corporations (*South-South Dialogue Conference*).

There has been intensive and sustained propaganda on the positive contributions of GMO on food security questions, very little has been done to draw attention to the inherent risks and hazards of industrial mono-cropping and consumption of GMOs such as loss of biodiversity, destruction of livestock, land grabbing, land and environmental degradation, communal conflicts over land and loss of rights. Therefore, there is an urgent need to present the true and full picture to Nigerians.

Industrial agriculture has no real contribution to national food sovereignty of Nigeria. It is part of the western development and capitalist economic regime bent on making Africa remain a cheap resource continent and market for finished products. More fundamentally, the GMO project is anti-creational. It disturbs, contradicts and destroys the ecosystem. God created every plant and vegetable with its seed in it.

We implore our policy makers to learn from the experience of Burkina Faso and a host of other countries that are rejecting the GMOs and their false gospel of agricultural development. We maintain that Nigeria's food sovereignty lies in investing aggressively in agriculture, empowering small holder farmers, and practicing agri-ecology that is sustainable and environment-friendly.

Signed:

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