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ECP/GR

Closing Statement by NGO Observer, Patrick Mulvany, ITDG
17 October 2001, St Petersburg

NGOs are pleased to be part of the ECP/GR and grateful to the Secretariat for keeping us informed and involved. Since Nitra in 1995, we have sought to encourage National Programmes and National Coordinators to find ways of involving informal sector organisations more in the important activities of the Network especially in conservation, development and sustainable use of PGRFA, advocacy, research, and awareness raising. It will take time and some resources, as has been recognised, especially in capacity building, training and legal advice, but NGOs are ready and willing.

There has been progress, as has been noted, but there is some way to go to ensure that the free flow of information and resources is enhanced. We, like you, want to see concrete actions. But we have to point out that reluctance by National Coordinators to be proactive and to report on progress will result in minimal activity.

We are ready and willing to collaborate in future work on on-farm / in-garden conservation, to share responsibilities, disseminate the results of our research and assist with raising the awareness of public and policy makers across the whole region. We are also happy to collaborate on Policy issues, Inter-regional cooperation and the development of the new phase of ECP/GR's work.

However, as we said in our final intervention at the Braunschweig symposium:
"In order to facilitate collaboration between the formal and informal sectors we are especially concerned that:

- Seed laws are reformed to allow greater choice of seeds and planting material in the market, without sacrificing consumer protection [we note the progress in some countries on this];
- As we increasingly share material [that we hold in Trust in our collections] with gene banks in our countries, we would strongly urge, through you, that these institutions implement Material Transfer Agreements that prevent claims of ownership or Intellectual Property Rights being sought on this material or any essentially derived material."

We would go further at this time and would urge those of you who are negotiating the IU to heed this concern when finalising the Definition and Access Articles in the proposed IU. We would like to see the phrase "in the form" before the word "received" deleted in Article 13.3.d. (See ITDG Briefing Paper "Three Little Words" and the GRAIN article "IU - the Final Stretch", attached)

We are pleased to be associated with the Statement on the IU List of Crops. We concur that without an improved list, the Treaty will be empty and relatively worthless. The statement could have been strengthened through inclusion of a sentence recognising the problems caused by IPRs that encourage privatisation, reduce access to materials and increase the possibilities of biopiracy. Hence the resistance of some developing countries to putting more crops and forages on the List.

We would like you to note, as discussed in our 1999 meeting in HDRA, UK, that we would wish to extend the coverage of MTAs that we use in our collections, to include a clause that prevents recipients from using genetic material from our collections

being used in the genetic modification of other varieties and species or the seeds themselves from being so modified.

We are also concerned that European governments are not distancing themselves enough from the pressures of the biotechnology industry to allow widespread use of agricultural GMOs. As a network focusing on the conservation of genetic resources, this should be high on the ECP/GR agenda for practical and biosafety reasons.

Reluctance to acknowledge significant consumer and producer rejection of Patents on Life and GMOs, both highly contested issues, will make it hard to increase public and political support for ECP/GR.

Finally, we would be grateful if you could identify the key NGOs / informal sector CSOs and farmer/gardener organisations in your countries and let me know. We are building our contacts in many European countries and the most effective form of communication is through national networks hosted by a key organisation. We, like you, would like to increase the active involvement not only of NGOs but also of farmers and gardeners in the work and see this as essential to the full implementation of the Global Plan of Action agreed in Leipzig, for which ECP/GR is the European Platform.

For your information, we have web pages hosted on the UKabc website <www.ukabc.org/ecpgr.htm> which you are welcome to visit.

Can I close by thanking the organisers of this meeting for inviting us to St Petersburg and raising the level of debate through the inspiration of Vavilov, who is omnipresent in the world, but whose spirit is at home here in this noble city.

Thank you