

International seed campaign “Sowing the future – harvesting diversity”

European Civic Forum
BUKO-Kampagne gegen Biopiraterie
ÖBV - Via Campesina Austria, Österreichische Berg-
und Kleinbäuer_innen Vereinigung
Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (AbL)
Over sixty Belgian organisations



Invitation to the media International Days of Action for a « Free access to seeds for all » 17-18 April 2011, Brussels

Over fifty organisations from all over Europe are calling for two days of action in Brussels on 17 April, the annual international day of peasant resistance launched by Via Campesina. This will be the climax of the Europe-wide campaign “Sowing the future, harvesting diversity” which denounces European Union legislation that encourages the privatisation of seeds by a handful of multinationals. This will have grave consequences for small farmers and gardeners, not just in Europe but throughout the world.

The major international companies know that controlling global food production starts with seeds which are the basis of all life. European legislation already serves their interests well, but at the end of 2011 the European Commission will present a draft directive for even more strict harmonised regulations that the European Parliament will examine for adoption early in 2012. This legislation will regulate the seed market in all member states and will have force of law throughout the EU.

EU seed legislation already gives strong preference to industrial varieties to the detriment of traditional heirloom varieties and the huge plant diversity developed over centuries. It restricts the right of farmers and gardeners to produce, multiply and exchange their own seeds. This is why we are demanding free access to seeds, support for those promoting regional crop diversity and the prohibition of patents on plants. In order to reduce high energy consumption in agriculture, the choice of seeds is vital. Priority should also be given to varieties capable of adapting to climate change and not requiring chemical fertilisers.

What’s going to happen in Brussels on 17-18 April?

10.00, 16 April: Press Conference, Mundo B, Rue d'Edimbourg 26, 1050 Bruxelles

11.00 – 18.00, 17 April: International Seed Swap, Maison des Cultures de Molenbeek (Chaussée de Merchtem 67). For thousands of years seeds were not commercial commodities, but were produced by those who worked the land. This non-commercial relationship to seeds still dominates in many countries in the South. In Europe it lives on in countless seed swaps, but also in the struggle of farmers against the taxes imposed on reproducing seeds at the farm. At a seed swap participants offer their seeds and experience from their garden or farm, either free of charge or in exchange for other seeds and advice. It is a simple way to reinvigorate forgotten diversity and to reaffirm the value of seeds for our food and culture. The more seed swaps there are, the less control the multinational companies will have. Over 20 initiatives from all over Europe will be participating, from Portugal to Denmark, Greece to the UK.

16.00 – 19.00, 17 April, Forum on “Access to seeds is a fundamental human right”

Maison des Culture de Molenbeek

The right to food is closely linked to the right to choose, multiply and exchange one's seeds. Today 67% of the international commercial seed market is controlled by ten multinationals. These have already imposed intellectual property rights on their varieties and constantly demand their reinforcement, while insisting on the prohibition of peasant varieties. In his 2009 report on “Seed policies and the right to food”, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, noted that it is vital to protect farmer seed systems if the right to food is to be respected.

The EU wants its seed legislation to be a model throughout the world and is seeking to impose it on countries in the South. Delegations from India (from the Green Foundation and the Deccan Development Society) and Turkey (members of the Federation of Farmers Unions Ciftçi-Sen, including the President, and of “Tohum Izi Denergi” – “Traces of Seeds”) will explain the way they reproduce and preserve the diversity of their crops. They will also outline the problems caused by the imposition of intellectual property rights on seeds, for example through the EU-India Free-Trade Agreement at present being negotiated. As for Turkey, a new seed law was introduced in 2008 under strong pressure from Europe. Olivier de Schutter will intervene during the forum by videoconference.

15.00 – 18.00, 18 April :

Anti-lobby tour finishing at Place du Luxembourg in front of the European Parliament

The increasing monopolisation of seeds by a few multinational companies has been possible thanks to their influence on governments. In Brussels they have offices close to the European Institutions. During this demonstration we will go to some of these multinationals and will explain the role they play in the seed trade. We will finish with a rally at the Place du Luxembourg with interventions by several participants and cultural contributions.

16.00, 18 April, Square Meus:

The petitions will be handed over to members of the European Parliament. As a stop of the Anti-lobby tour

We invite you to report on these two days of action which will provide a rare occasion to meet people involved in the seed question in many different countries. You will find more information at www.seed-sovereignty.org You can also contact :

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Useful information:

On India :

The three representatives of the Deccan Development Society (DDS) have cancelled their participation in the event in Brussels.

Dr. Vanaja Ramprasad from the Green Foundation will be present : www.greenconserve.com

On the topic of seeds and human rights:

The report « Seed policies and the right to food : enhancing agrobiodiversity and encouraging innovation » (2009), by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter :

www.srfood.org