

## **Presentation to the portfolio committee on agriculture at the South African Parliament in Cape Town on 6 March 2012.**

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### **Using Biotechnology, GMOs, to Fight Hunger and Poverty in Africa**

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Some of the world's best experts in Agriculture for the developing world, Prof. Robert Paarlberg and Prof. Calestous Juma, both at Harvard, come out with strong statements in favor of GM crops as part of the solution of the food security problems of Africa.

Millions of Africans are still subjected to food insecurity and malnutrition. The solution is not coming from advocates of theoretical agro-ecology concepts, it is coming from building infrastructure and capacity building for the smallholder farmers to make use of modern germplasm crossed into their own landraces in participative breeding programmes.

Whereas the multinational seed companies play only a minor role in Africa, they are participating efficiently in humanitarian projects (Cassava, Maize, Millet, Sorghum and Yam) with contracts which secure local farmers' rights. It is important to help establish programmes of biofortification and to make sure that in future the smallholders spend a lower percentage of their income for food.

Today, the largest proportion of farmers with successful adoption of GM crops are smallholders, debunking the myth that modern traits are only good for big industrial farms.

Whereas advocates of agroecology (M. Altieri, J. Pretty) come with attractive concepts, they still cannot produce hard figures of proof for better yields.

Global population is expected to increase from 7 billion in 2011 to 9 billion by 2041 and by 2050 grain demand is projected to increase by 50% (25% for feed, 25% for food). And those needs will have to be met on a shrinking acreage of arable land, coping with additional difficulties coming from climate change. The conclusions are very simple: we need to dramatically increase the efficiency of agricultural production methods, where ecology will play an important role, but without breeding of modern, much more efficiently producing crops we will be left without a chance for good solutions.

Contrary to the views of Ethiopia's director of the Environmental Protection Agency, Tewolde Egziabher, there is, despite of millions of hectares of cultivated GM crops worldwide, not a single case of a negative event or toxicity documented in peer reviewed literature. It is just amazing to see that advocates of independency of Africa from Europe are indulging into the false negative myths of GM opponents in Europe, sadly followed by European politicians. Also the slogan of Zimbabwe's former president, Levy Mwanawasa, is contradicted by hundreds of scientific papers: "Hunger is no reason to feed my people poison." As well as the statement of Zimbabwe's minister of agriculture, Dr Joseph Made: "Scientific research shows that GMOs contain toxic substances. Those who advocate GMOs have no scientific background." It is exclusively based on flawed science, rebutted by 99% of the world's best food safety specialists.

The November court ruling against the French ban on GM maize planting sets a new political mark. But again, the French Government is coming with a contradiction, based on "new evidence", which means simply another deeply flawed paper of the Séralini research group published lately.

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