



PRESS STATEMENT

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“If we fail on seed, we fail on food. If we fail on food, we fail on the most basic of human rights” – Oxfam Novib

Zambian farmers and human rights groups join the global campaign to protect farmers’ seed systems.

The role of Zambia’s farmers as custodians of the country’s seed heritage and national food security is under threat. Diverse seed is the basis for diversified food systems which underpins potential income, nutrition, good health, and climate resilience. All of these are priorities for national development. Two laws in Zambia are under review, with potential to seriously undermine this by imposing *additional* restrictions on farmers’ seed rights: limiting seed diversity, availability, access, affordability, use and most importantly farmers’ freedom to conserve, share and exchange seeds. A proposal for Zambia to join an International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) is being tabled, which will lock-in these restrictions and incentivise the policing of farmers and pit communities against each other.

“To limit the capacity of the people who feed you is unfathomable – and yet this is exactly what UPOV wants. This week’s global campaign against UPOV is timely. We need to learn lessons from other countries who are struggling with the shackles of neocolonial control of seed, and therefore food and ultimately the people” (Mutinta Nketani, National Coordinator, Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity).

Worldwide countries are being pressured to join UPOV through biased trade deals which benefit the global economic superpowers, allowing powerful corporations to regulate, standardise and privatise seeds to expand their own markets. UPOV has a reputation for its use of subtle lobby pressure and coercion of leadership through offers of financial assistance, lavish international meetings, and other incentives.

This week, over 200 civil rights groups have signed a statement against UPOV. These signatures represent the voices of millions of farmers the world over, for the freedom to sow seeds, grow food and live decent lives. “Today’s attack on seeds aims to put an end to peasant and indigenous agriculture, an end to independent food production. Where peasant food sovereignty prevails, it is difficult to turn us into cheap and dependent labour, people without territory and without history. Whether in Africa, Asia, Europe or the Americas, communities are fighting this pressure and we are united and mobilised to actively support them” ([A call for civil disobedience against the privatisation of peasant seeds: sign-on statement for the global day of action against UPOV, 2 December 2023.](#))



In [Benin](#), the national parliament ceased discussions of a law proposing to join UPOV, given stakeholders objections to its standards which drive seed privatisation in favour of transnationals like Monsanto/Bayer, Syngenta and Corteva. In Guatemala, Indigenous peoples are in the streets demanding that their government's proposed bill to adopt UPOV standards be scrapped. They call it "[the Monsanto Law](#)" and its rejection is part of an ongoing nationwide strike. In the Philippines, multi-actors filed an [environmental case](#) to the Supreme Court to stop the commercial propagation of the genetically modified golden rice that is patented by Syngenta and other agrochemical corporations. Moreover, Filipino farmers are spearheading the fight for the recognition and strengthening of farmers' rights to seeds and farmers' seed system by forwarding seed commoning as an alternative to the UPOV-like laws in the country. Extract from the Global Day of Action [Statement](#)

Over the years, multiple groups have challenged the Zambia Seed Control and Certification Institute (SCCI) for their assertion that Zambia should join UPOV. Despite objections, the formal intention is now evident through proposed changes to the Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) Act. Some stakeholders have reportedly received copies of the new draft, but farmer and civil society groups registered as concerned stakeholders, remain in the dark, making it impossible to respond timely through the appropriate public policy processes.

"It is absurd that 60 years after independence, farmers should still be fighting off the colonial seed system and struggling for legislative space for locally owned seed systems" (Charles Nkhoma, Director - Community Technology Development Trust)

Zambia's commercial seed system and agricultural markets are already majority owned and controlled by transnational corporations. This is inherently unfavourable for long term local economic growth. Market concentration undoes the well-intended attempts to support small and medium enterprise market entry and local livelihoods. Zambia's legislative measures already provide more than is required by international agreements. There is *no need* to change Zambia's current laws to further favour corporate interest. The proposed amendments to seed related laws and the move to join UPOV, will simply further consolidate control of Zambian seed and agriculture for foreign profit. Since independence, farmers have been waiting for equivalent laws to support their seed rights, diverse seed systems and agrobiodiversity to secure household nutrition, diversified incomes and climate resilience.

This is a crucial policy area. The type of seed system determines the type of agriculture system, which in turn, defines the food system and national food and nutritional security. The need for food sovereignty in the face of climate change, the post COVID-19 market crisis, national debt and price distortions make this issue even more relevant.



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All actors in agriculture, commerce, biodiversity, local development and human rights need to be involved in these future decision-making processes in Zambia. Farmers are primary stakeholders and must be genuinely and respectfully consulted, but not over the peak rainy and festive season. International agencies need to support local consultation and not usurp public policy processes on behalf of others.

“We have had countless meetings with SCCI. They refuse to listen to us. The current seed laws do not fit our seed. We want our seed celebrated not shunned. We want legislative support for our seed rights, and wider rights as per international laws which Zambia has signed but is ignoring. We feed this nation, and the seed is in our care. We need support from SCCI - they need to listen to our needs” (Annie Mutale Katongo, farmer and seed custodian, Shibujuni).

ZAAB joins the global campaign to STOP UPOV.

We once again offer support to SCCI to genuinely engage with farmers needs and respond with appropriate legislative measures.

END.

Issued by The Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity

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