

Press Release

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**THE GOVERNMENT’S RESOLUTION ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS IS
WEAKENING, FEARS THE JCTR**

Recently a shipment of grain was stopped and subjected to testing by the National Biosafety Authority at Mpulungu Harbor and Nakonde Border post to ensure that it did not contain GM content. The Authority also conducted inspections, monitoring, sensitization and awareness activities in Mpika, Kasama and Mbala. Despite the allure of the so-called “Green Revolution”, Zambia has long been concerned with the agricultural, economic, and biotechnical neo-colonization occasioned by genetic modification. There remain moral, environmental, scientific, and governance dimensions linked to Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). In the early 2000s – in the face of intensive pressure from the United States government and the international agribusiness lobby - Zambia was resolute in its opposition to the importation of GM maize to meet the short-term requirements of a food crisis. This pro-Zambia policy has continued; however, the JCTR fears that due to domestic and international economic pressures, the resolve is weakening, and the Pandora’s Box of GMOs may soon be opened.

Staff at the JCTR and Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre (KATC) have suggested that there are scientific, theological, environmental and economic issues related to GM products. These include: the patenting of living organisms, costs to farmers associated with purchasing seed and accompanying pesticides, decreasing crop yield, lower resistance to pests, decreasing seed diversity, limiting the autonomy of farmers to barter and sell their seeds, increased individual and collective reliance on large agribusiness, cross pollination, threats to biodiversity and the promotion of profit before people .

These concerns have been amplified by Pope Francis in a variety of channels, including *Laudato Si’*. The issue of GM products is also squarely placed within the context of food security and human dignity. The issue is not lack of food, but the interaction of numerous factors, including distribution mechanisms, the cultivation of cash crops to meet debt requirements, poverty and the fact that 30 – 40% of the world’s food is wasted. Pope Francis noted “Whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the poor” (*Laudato Si’*, 50).

To promote the common good, enhance the quality of life of the poor, ensure intergenerational stewardship, and demonstrate respect for the integrity of Creation, the JCTR urges the government of Zambia to maintain its principled, visionary and practical opposition to the importation and incorporation of Genetically Modified (GM) products particularly into its agricultural sector and food chain. Research still needs to be done on the impact of GM foods, particularly on people whose diet is based largely in the consumption of maize. There continue to be scientific, health and environmental issues associated with GMOs. Therefore, it is essential that the “**precautionary principle**” be applied until all of the facts are in and informed public policy decisions can be made. To provide all Zambians with an adequate and nutritious diet, we do not need to rely on GM products. We can promote and expand small scale agriculture, particularly organic farming and adopt human-centered models of production and consumption. We can also ensure food security is a core dimension of Economic, Social and Cultural rights. The well-being of all Zambians, particularly those on the margins, requires community development, agricultural autonomy, economic opportunities and a commitment to the common good. Zambia must remain strong in its opposition to GM products.

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