

To:

Y.B. Dato' Sri Liow Tiong Lai, Minister of Health

Y.B. Dato Sri Douglas Uggah Embas, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment

Dato' Zool Azha bin Yusof, Secretary General, Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment and Chairperson, National Biosafety Board (NBB)

Tan Sri Dato' Sri Dr Hj Mohd. Ismail bin Merican, Director General of Health

Mr Letchumanan Ramatha, Director General of Biosafety

Dr Shahnaz Murad, Director, Institute of Medical Research (IMR)

9 February 2011

Open Letter from Civil Society Organizations in Response to the Field Release of Genetically Modified Mosquitoes in Malaysia

Many of us were among the 87 civil society organizations from around the world that sent you, in December 2010, a statement of concern regarding the field release of genetically modified (GM) *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes in Malaysia. At the time, we had stated that it was not clear when such releases would occur, but given the tremendous international interest in the issue, it would be regrettable if the field trials were to be shrouded in secrecy.

It has recently come to our attention that the field trials have actually happened, on 21 December 2010 and were completed on 5 January 2011. This was brought to light through a press statement dated 25 January 2011, issued by the proponent of the field experiments, the Institute for Medical Research (IMR). However, as late as 4 January 2011, there were press reports in the Malaysian media stating that the trials had been postponed. It therefore appears that neither the local communities nor the Malaysian public at large knew that these trials had occurred.

We wish to express our dismay and regret that the opportunity for transparency and confidence in the tests and the science (and oversight) behind the tests has been lost. We had hoped that lessons could be learnt from the field releases in 2009 and 2010 of the same GM mosquitoes in the Cayman Islands, which had been strongly criticized for being conducted without public consultation or ethical oversight, for failure to publish appropriate and robust risk assessment, and for not seeking the informed consent from local people.

How sad that once again, we are forced to lose confidence in a technology, which apparently can only thrive on secrecy. While the risks associated with the GM mosquitoes would not disappear with increased transparency, honest and timely disclosure would have demonstrated sincerity in approaching the issue.

Furthermore, as our previous letter highlighted, meaningful and effective public participation and consultation are pre-requisites for such a controversial application of GM technology. While we appreciate that some efforts have been made towards this end, the reaction that the announcement has provoked clearly indicates that discussion and consultation are still sorely needed. Given the risks associated with the GM

mosquitoes, any plans to release them into the environment, ‘inhabited’ or ‘uninhabited’, must be subject to full prior public disclosure for the people’s free, prior and informed consent. Therefore, we respectfully urge you to seriously consider putting in place a better mechanism that can meet this requirement.

Now that the trials have gone ahead, we respectfully call on the Malaysian authorities to carry out robust and detailed monitoring of the field test site in order to identify if there have been any negative impacts on the local ecology and human health. The monitoring plan should be accompanied by public reporting, as well as a plan for remedial and compensatory action to be taken should any adverse effects occur.

We respectfully call on the Malaysian authorities to publicly release the full report and analysis of the field trials. We also earnestly call for the cessation of all further field trials of the GM mosquitoes for the good of the Malaysian public and its environment.

Thank you for your kind consideration of our views.

Yours sincerely,

1. Acción Ecológica, Ecuador
2. African Biodiversity Network (ABN)
3. African Centre for Biosafety (ACB), South Africa
4. AGRA Watch
5. Agricultura Familiar e Agroecologia (AS-PTA), Brazil
6. All India Drug Action Network
7. Archdiocese of Manila Ministry on Ecology, Philippines
8. Ban Toxics, Philippines
9. Biowatch South Africa
10. Broad Initiative for Negros Development (BIND), Philippines
11. Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN)
12. Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones de Derecho Rural y Reforma Agraria (CEIDRA), Paraguay
13. Centro Ecológico, Brazil
14. COCAP, Philippines
15. COECOCEIBA-Friends of the Earth Costa Rica
16. Council for Responsible Genetics
17. Cumberland Countians for Peace & Justice, USA
18. Diverse Women for Diversity
19. Doctors for Food Safety and Biosafety, India
20. Ecological Society of the Philippines
21. EcoNexus, UK
22. Edmonds Institute, USA
23. Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria
24. ETC Group
25. Farmers Forum-South Cotabato, Philippines
26. Food and Water Europe
27. Food and Water Watch USA

28. Freedom from Debt Coalition – South Cotabato, Sranggani and General Santos Chapter, Philippines
29. Friends of the Earth International
30. Friends of the Earth Sierra Leone
31. GeneWatch UK
32. GM Freeze, UK
33. GM Watch, UK
34. Green Alert Negros, Philippines
35. Green Convergence for Safe Food, Healthy Environment and Sustainable Economy, Philippines
36. Green Families and Communities Network (GFCN), a.k.a. World Environment Day Philippines (WED-Phils.), Philippines
37. Greenpeace Southeast Asia
38. InfOGM, France
39. Initiative for Health and Equity in Society (IHES), India
40. Institute of Science in Society (ISIS), UK
41. JPICC-AMRSP, Philippines
42. Justice and Peace, Marbel, Philippines
43. Kalimudan Culture and Arts, Glamang Organic Farmers Association, Philippines
44. Lingkod-Tao-Kalikasan, Philippines
45. MASIPAG-Visayas, Philippines
46. Navdanya Trust, India
47. Negros Island for Sustainable and Rural Development (NISARD) – Negros Occidental, Philippines
48. Negros Island for Sustainable and Rural Development (NISARD) – Negros Oriental, Philippines
49. Negros Occidental Office of Provincial Agriculture, Philippines
50. Negros Organic Agriculture Movement (NOAM), Philippines
51. Network for a GE-Free Latin America (RALLT)
52. Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility, United Church of Christ, USA
53. Network Opposed to GMOs-Philippines
54. Oakland Institute, USA
55. OGM Dangers, France
56. Organic Consumers Association, USA
57. Partnership for Clean Air, Philippines
58. Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific (PAN AP)
59. Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA)
60. Pesticide Action Network Uruguay
61. Planetary Health, Inc., USA
62. Red de Acción en Alternativas al Uso de Agrotóxicos de Venezuela (RAPAL Venezuela)
63. Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, India
64. SAI (Save Animals Initiative) Sanctuary Trust, India
65. Sanib-Lakas ng mga Aktibong Lingkod ng Inang Kalikasan (SALIKA), Philippines
66. Sibol ng Agham at Teknolohiya (Wellspring of Science and Technology), Philippines
67. SRI Pilipinas, Philippines

68. Sunray Harvesters, India
69. Sustainable Agriculture of Louisville, USA
70. Sustainable Integrated Area Development Initiatives in Mindanao-
Convergence for Asset Reform and Rural Development (SIMCARRD),
Philippines
71. Terra de Direitos, Brazil
72. Thanal, India
73. Third World Network (TWN)
74. Washington Biotechnology Action Council, USA