

November 2007

Violent attacks on farmers occupying a Syngenta GMO field trial in Brazil - Statement of solidarity from Friends of the Earth Europe

Friends of the Earth Europe condemns the attacks on 21 October by armed militia on peasant farmers in Paraná state, Brazil, which resulted in one farmer shot dead and six seriously wounded. According to reports by Via Campesina, the global family farmers' movement, the peasants were occupying peacefully a Syngenta GMO maize and soy test site when armed militia attacked [1].

We offer our sympathy and solidarity to the family of the Valmir Mota, a leader of MST, Brazil's landless workers' movement, who was killed, and the six wounded victims and their families. We offer our ongoing support to Via Campesina and MST who are struggling to transform Syngenta's GMO testing area into an Agro-ecology Center for the reproduction of native seeds for family farmers.

Friends of the Earth Europe expresses deep concern that Syngenta – a multinational agrochemicals and biotechnology company based in Switzerland, is associated with these attacks. Syngenta must now comply with any investigations into this violence and explain what has happened, including its role in this tragedy, to its shareholders and to the public.

We also urge the European Commission and European Parliament to take action to:

- Investigate the role of Syngenta in this tragedy and its relationship with the militia in Brazil
- Suspend all official contacts with the company until and unless it is proven that there is no direct or indirect involvement of Syngenta in the killings
- Urge the Brazilian government to ensure those responsible are punished

Furthermore, we support the demands of Via Campesina:

- That the authorities in Brazil conduct a thorough investigation and punish the gunmen – the culprits of these crimes – and those responsible for ordering the attack
- The immediate retreat of Syngenta from the area in Paraná where they have conducted the GMO field tests so that these areas can be converted into peasant based, sustainable agriculture
- The disbandment of armed militias in the region, and the immediate closure of the NF Security company
- Assurance of the safety and protection of the lives of the leaders and workers of Via Campesina and MST in the region.

[1] A Via Campesina encampment located at Syngenta's experimental GMO farm in Santa Tereza do Oeste (Paraná), was attacked by an armed militia on 21 October.

During the massacre, an activist from the Movement of Landless Workers (MST) and member of Via Campesina, Valmir Mota de Oliveira, 42 years old (known as "Keno,") was killed at point-blank range by two shots to the chest. He had been threatened for the previous six months by the Syngenta/MPR/SRO consortium. Workers including Gentil Couto Viera, Jonas Gomes de Queiroz, Domingos Barretos, Izabel Nascimento de Souza, and Hudson Cardin were seriously injured.

According to Via Campesina, Syngenta was thought to be using the services of an armed militia which was acting through a front company, NF Security, in conjunction with the Rural Society of the Western Region (SRO) and the Movement of Rural Producers (MPR), which are tied to agribusiness.

Syngenta's experimental farm has been occupied by peasants since March 2006 to bring attention to the illegal cultivation of GMO soy and corn seeds. Syngenta was fined by the Brazilian Environment Protection Agency in 2006 for conducting illegal field trials of GM soy within the 10 km buffer zone around the Iguaçu Falls World Heritage Site, but has still not paid the fine. Syngenta has since successfully lobbied the Brazilian government to change the law to reduce the buffer zone to just 500m.

Further information:

<http://viacampesina.org/>

<http://news.nacla.org/2007/10/29/corporate-murder-in-brazil-land-activists-shot-by-militia-linked-to-multinational/>