



**The United Church  
of Canada  
General Council**

# **GCE Social Justice and Protecting Earth's Genetic Heritage and the Traditional Rights of Farmers (2005-04- 21-240)**

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WHEREAS "the needs of the poor have priority over the wants of the rich" because "the way our society treats the poor and oppressed is, for us, a test of God's redeeming presence and of human justice" (30th General Council); and

WHEREAS "we must ensure that advances in biotechnology respect the integrity of creation, and that such advances do not give power to the few at the expense of the many" (31st General Council); and

WHEREAS "we are one Earth community, one human family and we share one destiny" and "we recognize God's call to live in harmony with this total community, to draw on the Earth's sustenance responsibly, and to care for it that all may benefit equitably now and in the future" (34th General Council); and

WHEREAS "the development and dissemination of genetically modified food varieties, both in Canada and globally, should not contribute to the growth of injustice, inequality, or poverty, the loss of biodiversity, or the erosion of the common good" and "a genetically modified food variety should only be deployed in a specific context if it can be demonstrated that it will not tend to undermine or erode food security" (38th General Council); and

WHEREAS "living organisms, and the genetic heritage shared by all life, have an intrinsic value that precedes their utility and commercial value" and "are a gift of God to be cared for and shared for the common good" that "no person or organization should be allowed to claim...as intellectual property" (38th General Council); and

WHEREAS "The United Church of Canada recognizes the contribution of countless generations of women and men who have selectively bred and nurtured the diversity (of food varieties) we enjoy today" and that "new food varieties being developed build on the efforts and discoveries of others-often of entire communities and cultures" (38th General Council); and

WHEREAS "the right of farmers, other food producers, and food conservationists to save seeds, breed livestock, and develop new food varieties should be protected and should not be undermined by any claims of intellectual property nor by the use of new genetic modification technologies or related legal instruments" (38th General Council); and

WHEREAS "cultures and nations should also have the right to take measures to protect the traditional genetic heritage of their food from genetic contamination" (38th General Council);

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Executive of the General Council of The United Church of Canada, through the Office of the General Secretary, undertake the following actions to help ensure that the development and dissemination of genetically modified varieties does not contribute to the growth of injustice, inequality, or poverty, the loss of biodiversity, or the erosion of the common good:

1. Call on the Government of Canada to ensure that Canadian trade and aid policies do not promote-directly or indirectly-the adoption of genetically modified crops, livestock, or foods in nations that have not explicitly chosen to adopt such foods or that have not yet adopted a regulatory framework governing their use. In particular, the use of GM food varieties in any form of food aid to nations that have not explicitly chosen to adopt such foods or that have not yet adopted a regulatory framework governing their use should be banned and the Government of Canada should ensure that an adequate supply of GM-free food is available for emergency assistance.
2. Call on the Government of Canada to support and promote agricultural research that fosters the autonomy of farmers, promotes ecological sustainability, and leads to genuine benefits for both farmers and consumers. In particular, call on the Government of Canada to
  - promote truly public agricultural research, ensuring significant space for purely public initiatives
  - ensure that food varieties and related research developed in the public domain or with mainly public resources remain public property

- support research into sustainable agricultural systems in both Canada and in the global South
  - support independent research on the economic, social, and ecological effects of GM crops and livestock-both in Canada and in the global South
3. Renew and deepen the work of The United Church of Canada on issues of sustainable agriculture within the wider context of deepening our understanding of sustainable community-both denominationally and ecumenically, and both in Canada and globally.

And further, that the Executive of the General Council of The United Church of Canada, through the office of the General Secretary, undertake the following actions to help ensure that genes, genetic material, living organisms, and food varieties are protected as a common good that cannot be undermined by claims of intellectual property or related methods of control; to ensure that cultures and nations can protect their traditional genetic heritage; and to protect the traditional rights of farmers to exchange seeds and breed livestock:

4. Advocate for a complete prohibition on the patenting of genes, gene sequences, and living organisms-both nationally and internationally, and through both denominational and ecumenical bodies.
5. Call on the Government of Canada to move immediately to ratify the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol and to ensure that the provisions and spirit of the protocol are respected in the practices and policies of all departments and agencies of the Canadian government.
- 6.
- a. Endorse, as a denomination, the citizen's Treaty Initiative to Share the Genetic Commons (TISGC) and advocate for the Government of Canada to adopt its principles in both its legislation and its international treaty and trade negotiations.
  - b. Encourage individual United Church congregations, other denominations, ecumenical bodies, and faith groups to formally endorse the TISGC.
  - c. Produce, either denominationally or ecumenically, suitable worship and study materials on the TISGC and the related issues around the patenting of genes, gene sequences, and living organisms, including specific dimensions related to seeds and food.
7. Support the right of nations, provinces, and local jurisdictions to declare themselves-if they democratically choose to do so-as "GM-free zones" where neither genetically modified livestock nor crops would be raised.

The Executive of the General Council, April 21-25, 2005, pp. 261-262

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