

Speech of Kassahun Embaye, ITPGRFA Focal Point for Ethiopia, to the plenary of GB4 on Agenda Item 13: Implementation of Article 9 – Farmers’ Rights

Madam Chair,

I am speaking on behalf of Ethiopia and would like to thank the Secretariat for the document IT/GB-4/11/16 and related information documents, which have been collected in response to Resolution 6/2009 and provide a good basis for our discussion of Agenda item 13 on the implementation of Article 9 – Farmers’ Rights.

Ethiopia attaches great importance and high value to Farmers’ Rights. It firmly believes that biodiversity conservation and sustainable use efforts cannot be successful without fully recognizing and respecting Farmers’ Rights. On these principles, Ethiopia has mainstreamed Farmers’ Rights in its agriculture and natural resources related policies, strategies and operational plans. It was, therefore, very fitting for Ethiopia to accept the request with great pleasure and anticipation, to participate in the Farmers’ Rights implementation assessment exercise and in mapping out prudent ways and means forward.

I would now like to draw your attention particularly to the Global Consultations on Farmers’ Rights carried out in 2010, in response to Resolution 6/2009. The results of the Global Consultations on Farmers’ Rights have been presented as an input paper to the Governing Body, submitted by Ethiopia to the Secretariat. I would like to thank the Secretary for having circulated this document to the Contracting Parties as IT/GB-4/11/Circ.1. It is available at the Treaty website for this Fourth Session of the Governing Body.

In Resolution 6/2009, the Governing Body requested the Secretariat to convene regional workshops on Farmers’ Rights, subject to the agreed priorities of the Programme of Work and Budget and subject to the availability of financial resources. Due to a lack of resources available to the Secretariat, it was unable to convene the regional workshops. Consequently, the Fridtjof Nansen Institute of Norway offered to organize these, and the Bureau encouraged Contracting Parties to consider providing funding for the consultations. The regional workshops were merged into one global consultation process with regional components, to minimize funding requirements and workload. The consultation process included an e-mail-based survey conducted between July and September 2010 and a conference held in Addis Ababa, 23–25 November 2010.

The consultation process was supported by the Swedish International Biodiversity Programme SwedBio, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation NORAD, the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Development Fund of Norway, and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation. Let me take this opportunity to thank the sponsors and the Fridtjof Nansen Institute for making the Global Consultations on Farmers’ Rights a reality.

In the two phases of the consultations, a total of 171 experts and stakeholders participated, from 46 countries in Africa, Asia, the Near East, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Europe, and from farmer organizations, government institutions, the seed industry, NGOs, IGOs, research and other relevant groups. Most of them participated in their personal capacities. I would like to thank all for their participation.

The Global Consultations facilitated a highly valuable exchange of views and experiences regarding the realization of Farmers' Rights at the national level. The proceedings have recently been published as a report, which is available at www.farmersrights.org.

Furthermore, the Global Consultations resulted in recommendations from the regions, as well as joint cross-cutting recommendations from the Global Consultation Conference. In light of the history of Farmers' Rights, these recommendations can be seen as a break-through in the development of a joint understanding on how to realize Farmers' Rights. This is because participants representing so different views managed to arrive at substantial joint recommendations.

For example, one joint recommendation is that formal and informal seed systems should not be seen as excluding each other, but should be recognised as complementary and, for this reason there is a need to ensure legal space for each to make its contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources.

Furthermore, the Governing Body is requested to study options for provisions in national seed legislation of Contracting Parties, with a view to providing recommendations for a balanced facilitation of regulation for all types of seeds.

Madam Chair, in light of the achievements made through the Global Consultations on Farmers' Rights, let me present a few central results and recommendations.

The e-mail-based consultation process showed that achievements have been made within all four elements of Farmers' Rights in Article 9, and that there are many success stories. It also shows that some major obstacles remain to be overcome in order to ensure the realization of these rights:

- The prime concern among most respondents is the need for guidance and support from the Governing Body to develop or adjust national legislation, policies, strategies and programmes for the realization of Farmers' Rights. In particular, respondents were concerned about how to ensure or re-establish sufficient legal space within seed laws and intellectual property legislation to enable farmers to continue conserving, developing and sustainably using the diversity of plant genetic resources.
- Saving what remains of traditional knowledge from becoming lost is the most central concern with regard to the protection of traditional knowledge. Further measures to document and encourage the sharing of traditional knowledge are urgently needed. Furthermore, to avoid misappropriation of traditional knowledge, it is important to ensure adequate legislation, and arrangements at the international level.
- There are many examples of benefit-sharing, mostly at the local level. Local seed banks, seed exchange networks, participatory plant-breeding projects, registries of crop genetic resources and value-adding projects are all examples of benefit-sharing measures aimed at strengthening informal seed systems and thereby improving farmers' livelihoods. Scaling up such experiences to the national level is among the central challenges.
- Several respondents mentioned that awareness regarding Farmers' Rights had increased in their countries, and that farmers are involved in hearing processes. Nevertheless, respondents also noted that much remains to be done to facilitate greater awareness among

farmers and decision-makers and to ensure farmers' participation in decision-making. The need for awareness-raising and capacity-building measures in this regard is an important concern among the majority of the respondents.

- Last, but not least, parties are at different levels with regard to Farmers' Rights implementation. Thus, technical and financial support is required for the realization of Farmers' Rights, according to most respondents.

These findings from the e-mail based consultation process were presented to the Global Consultation Conference in Addis Ababa as a basis for its discussions. The Global Consultation Conference provided an overview of national measures affecting the realization of Farmers' Rights, achievements and success stories in this regard, farmers' views on required measures, major obstacles and options, gaps and needs, as well as recommendations to the Governing Body.

It also had regional consultations in four groups: Africa, Asia, Latin America with the Caribbean, and Europe with North America. The results from these consultations were presented on the third day, and provided the basis of joint recommendations to the Governing Body.

I would have liked to share with you the important insights and experiences exchanged at this conference. However, due to the short time I have, I can only refer you to the report on the Global Consultations that you can download at www.farmersrights.org.

I would also have liked to share with you the recommendations from the regions which contain important suggestions for the realization of Farmers' Rights in the different regions, and also such recommendations that may be relevant for the considerations of the Governing Body. But for the same reason (time limitation), I would instead like to recommend you to study the regional recommendations in the input paper that is available at the GB4 website.

Nevertheless, Madame Chair, I would like to present some of the key joint recommendations, as these are highly relevant for our discussion today.

The Joint Recommendations state that Farmers' Rights is a cornerstone of the Treaty, and that the Governing Body should prioritise, and request the assistance of FAO and other relevant international organisations in the provision of technical and financial support to national governments in the realisation of Farmers' Rights. Capacity building is key in this regard.

Furthermore, the question of how to better include farmers' organizations and other stakeholders in the work of the Governing Body is addressed. In this context, the successful progress achieved by governments in the reform of the UN FAO Committee on World Food Security, or CFS, is recognized, and the Governing Body is requested to consider adopting the procedures agreed in the CFS as a template for new procedures in the Governing Body to ensure the full participation of all stakeholder groups.

I would in particular like to draw your attention to a recommendation for the Governing Body to establish an *ad hoc* working group to develop voluntary guidelines on the national implementation of Article 9 and related provisions in a transparent, participatory and inclusive manner, with the effective involvement of farmers' organizations and other relevant organizations. This recommendation is derived from the many voices in the consultation

process suggesting or demanding that such a process is needed to make progress in the realization of Farmers' Rights, and it is inspired by the valuable contributions of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food.

The input paper goes on to identify important questions with regard to the realization of Farmers' Rights that would need to be included in the work of such an *ad hoc* working group. Please refer to the input paper available at the GB4 website.

Madame Chair, in closing, let me reiterate Ethiopia's commitment to the realization of Farmers' Rights, as they are vital to the livelihoods of our farmers and the future availability of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. Our commitment is also reflected in our hosting of the Global Consultation Conference. Ethiopia has promoted Farmers' Rights internationally since it first came up in the FAO in the 1980s, and has established legal instruments at the national level that fully recognize these rights. We are currently working to implement these legal instruments to fully realize Farmers' Rights in our country. This is a challenging task in a developing country, and therefore it is our sincere hope that the Governing Body at this Fourth Session will make substantial progress on this important agenda item, by providing guidance on effective implementation of Farmers' Rights at all levels.

Thank you!