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Greenpeace welcomes Polish ban on Monsanto maize

WARSAW/BRUSSELS Greenpeace welcomes yesterday's decision by the Polish government to ban all 17 seed varieties of a Monsanto genetically modified maize, and calls on all EU member states to take action to prevent the cultivation of GMOs in Europe.

"The Polish government has made a responsible decision by deciding not to let GM seeds be planted in our country," said Maciej Muskat of Greenpeace Poland. "It will prevent the destruction of biodiversity in our country and protect Polish farmers' crops from the costs of GMO contamination. Other European countries should follow Poland's example."

The European Commission placed Monsanto's MON810 [1] on the EU seed catalogue in September, permitting its sale across the EU. Poland wants to ban the GM seeds for the next two years - which it may do under the EU Seeds Directive - until it has completed its own evaluation studies. The decision will prevent the sale and use of the varieties.

"Poland's decision makes it even clearer that GM crops authorisations should not move forward, unless the European Commission wants to face a political deadlock similar to the one that led to the moratorium in 1999," said Eric Gall of Greenpeace European Unit.

The Polish government's decision follows sustained campaigning by Greenpeace Poland since September.

Hungary imposed a similar ban on MON810 in January.

NOTES TO EDITOR [1] Genetically modified maize MON810 was authorised at EU level in 1998, before member states enacted a de facto moratorium on new authorisations. Five governments also enacted temporary bans against certain authorised GMOs. In November 2004, the Commission failed to force Member States to lift these bans, which will now be put to a vote by EU environment ministers, unless the Commission withdraws its proposal.

[2] Several applications for other GMOs for cultivation are in the pipeline at EU level, the most advanced being Pioneer's 1507 maize and Syngenta's Bt11 maize. Following member state objections, both applications are currently being reviewed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which is due to deliver a scientific opinion. Greenpeace has repeatedly criticised the EFSA for failing to conduct a proper assessment of GMOs.

CONTACT

Eric Gall, Greenpeace European Unit, tel +32 496 161 582
Maciej Muskat, Greenpeace Poland, tel +48 509 058 651