

USCMA 2003 Resolution
A Mission Response to Upholding the Rights to Seeds,
Plants and Agricultural Resources

Let it be resolved that:

We as Catholic missionaries realize that we have a moral responsibility to protect the natural resources given to all of humanity by God for the common good. And, as such, call for membership support of The *AFRICA* Resolution - H. CON. RES. 269 (*The Agriculture and Farm Resources for Indigenous Communities of Africa*)

Text of the House Concurrent Resolution 269

Expressing the sense of the Congress that the trade and economic development policies of the United States should respect and support the rights of African farmers with respect to their agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies.

Whereas indigenous agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies are vitally important to the economies, cultures, environment, food security, and rural livelihoods of sub-Saharan Africa;

Whereas the majority of Africans in the sub-Saharan region depend directly on agriculture for their daily sustenance and income needs;

Whereas the majority of farmers in this region cultivate their crops on small family plots, growing crops and raising livestock for their own food needs, saving and exchanging their seeds and produce, and freely selling their surplus harvest according to traditional practices passed on for generations;

Whereas African women are the main producers of food crops cultivated for family and local consumption;

Whereas public access to and communal prerogatives over agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies are integral to African culture, food security, and to the local economies;

Whereas corporations and outside individuals are profiting from the use of these agricultural and biological resources, and from the traditional knowledge and technologies, without the prior agreement of African farmers and local communities;

Whereas the international trend toward the patenting of life forms threatens public access to and communal prerogatives over agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies in Africa; and

Whereas in order to safeguard the access and rights of African farmers to their agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies, the Organization of African Unity has developed the African Model Legislation for the Protection of the Rights of Local Communities, Farmers and Breeders, and for the Regulation of Access to Biological Resources: Now, therefore, be it *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring)*, That it is the sense of Congress that--

- (1) African nations and people have the right to ensure the conservation, evaluation, and sustainable use of their agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies, and to govern access to them;

- (2) African farmers have the right to access, use, exchange, and share their agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies as established by customary law and practice;
- (3) African nations have the right to protect the rights of farmers and communities to their agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies;
- (4) the patenting of life forms that are part of African agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies violates the rights described in paragraphs (1) through (3);
- (5) the African Model Legislation for the Protection of the Rights of Local Communities, Farmers and Breeders, and for the Regulation of Access to Biological Resources seeks to recognize, protect, and support the rights described in paragraphs (1) through (3); and
- (6) the trade and economic development policies of the United States toward Africa should respect and support the rights of African farmers with respect to their agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies, and the provisions of the African Model Legislation.

Call for Specific Actions:

Contact your representative and ask for their co-sponsorship of the AFRICA Resolution - H. CON. RES. 269 (*The Agriculture and Farm Resources for Indigenous Communities of Africa*)

- a) By phone at their local office or via the Capital Hill switch board 202-224-3121.
- b) Or, by writing to your House Representative at their local office or the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.) Sample letter will be available at conference and at www.uscatholicmission.org.)

Sample Letter to Congress

Your Letterhead or Address

Date

Address of Local Office or this general Capital Hill address.

Representative _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative _____,

I strongly urge you to cosponsor the *AFRICA* Resolution (H. Con. Res. 269). This resolution expresses the sense of the Congress that the trade and economic development policies of the United States should respect and support the rights of African farmers with respect to their agricultural and biological resources, traditional knowledge, and technologies. This includes the rights of African farmers to freely safeguard, access, use, save, exchange and sell their seeds and crops.

International trade rules encourage corporations and individuals to claim exclusive rights over agricultural and natural resources around the world and especially in Africa. This threatens the ability of African farmers to ensure their food security, livelihoods and culture, and to safeguard the planet's bio-diversity. Farmers' rights to control and use their own seeds, crops and plants according to the custom of generations must be upheld under international law.

Agricultural resources are the common heritage of humankind. Please begin to protect farming' rights by cosponsoring H. Con. Res. 269 (The *AFRICA* Resolution) as a start right away.

Respectfully,

Your Name