

Dear organizers,

With both regret and anger I am writing to withdraw from participation in one of the panels of the FAO-hosted seed industry conference next week. It was only late yesterday that I was able to read through the conference background information and agenda. Until then, I had been under the mistaken impression that this was an appropriately open and neutral FAO guided conference intended to debate and discuss the future of the commercial seed industry in the context of this century's many crises. Wrongly, I had assumed that the format of the meeting would adhere to both FAO and ITPGRFA (Plant Treaty) practices of hearing from all perspectives and promoting constructive dialogue. Despite the recent travesty of the so-called Food Systems Summit in which the UN's Rome-based agencies and the UN System itself was manipulated by agribusiness interests, FAO doesn't seem to have learned from the experience.

It is simply unacceptable for FAO to structure a conference on such important issues in such a biased format. All of the topics on the agenda (and more) are important and worthy of consideration. All perspectives should be available. Absurdly, the structure of the conference excludes critical voices and viewpoints of peasant and indigenous peoples organizations or other civil society organizations who actively participate in such important multilateral venues as the Plant Treaty, the CFS, the CGRFA, or the FAO Conference and Counsel.

It is not sufficient for FAO to tick off boxes in order to claim that there is representation from diverse viewpoints.

To be clear, I am not criticizing the organizers for my own inability to review the conference information until last night. Because of my eyesight handicap, it was difficult for me to access the PDF material and read through the detail. When I asked for assistance with this yesterday (having missed the preparatory meeting very early yesterday my time) the secretariat very kindly sent me the information. By that time, however, other colleagues had managed to access the full agenda.

I have been attending FAO conferences for many decades. FAO has always remembered that it is a multilateral United Nations agency and it has striven to engage all sectors as well as governments in its consulted of processes. FAO and the other Rome-based agencies are not to blame for the failure of the FSS in September but it should have learned from this embarrassment. I am ready and willing to discuss my concerns with conference organizers and/or member governments.

With regret,

Pat Mooney
Founder – ETC Group