

Brazil's Environment Czar Lashes Out at Transgenic Soybeans

Contributed by Lúcia Nórcio
Friday, 24 September 2004

Brazil's Minister of Environment, Marina Silva, voiced her opposition yesterday, in Curitiba, capital of Paraná state, to the irregular cultivation of transgenic soybeans, before the National Congress has defined its position on the Biosecurity Law.

During a meeting with Governor Roberto Requião, the Minister asserted that Brazilian research on conventional soybeans should not be disregarded, just because of a presumed economic advantage.

"The cultivation of soybeans smuggled from Argentina creates a situation that isn't the best one for the country. The storehouse of research the country possesses on conventional soybeans cannot be overlooked in consequence of just any investment or opportunity," she observed.

Silva judged the government's effort to maintain Paraná as a transgenic-free zone deserving of inclusion in the Biosecurity Law.

"I consider Governor Requião's position a legitimate one, because it is based on market opportunities and the growing tendency among consumers to desire products with guaranteed benefits - in terms of both health and the environment. This effort must be recognized in the legal norm that is being established," she went on to say.

In addition to the economic factor, the Minister recalled the principle of caution that the country promised to respect in international treaties.

"We are trying to implant a virtuous process that safeguards the international commitments that Brazil assumed when it ratified the biodiversity convention - the Cartagena Protocol - and when it signaled in its bill that it would be defending the interests of researchers, consumers, and producers, through the principle of caution," she affirmed.

Silva explained that there are two tendencies when it comes to approval of the Biosecurity Law.

One is the approval of the substitute bill in the Chamber of Deputies, in accordance with the Ministry of Environment's proposal.

The other is represented by the Senate technical commissions, which have yet to issue an opinion.

The Minister said that Paraná is in harmony with the federal government in the formulation of environmental policies.

"The construction of biodiversity corridors, the restoration of riverbank/streambank woods, the elimination of trash dumps, and other activities that are going on in Paraná have the support of the Ministry of Environment, which is also providing incentives to similar programs in other states."

The Minister was in Paraná for the inauguration of the Program to Protect Remnants of Araucaria, one of the joint state/federal programs to try to revert the degraded condition of Parana's conifer forests.

Agência Brasil

Reporter: Lúcia Nórcio

Translator: David Silberstein