

Protocols

**Of Stewardship and Caution-**

Goodwill Message from Rev Dr Felix Omobude, President, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria at the Conference on The Nigerian Biosafety Act and GMOS -Implications for Nigerians and Africa held in Abuja 24-25<sup>th</sup> May 2016

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It gives me great pleasure to be a part of this conference at which I believe there will be deep interrogations of the Nigerian Biosafety Management Act as well as the issue of the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into Nigeria.

The key anchor of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the Precautionary Principle which states that “if an action or policy has a suspected risk of causing harm to the public, or to the environment, in the absence of scientific consensus (that the action or policy is not harmful), would not permit any system that promotes.”<sup>1</sup> As far as we know, there is no consensus that GMOs have no harmful implications and so we are convinced that this principle should be at the core of agricultural, environmental and public health policies.

Permit me to state that while the Church is not averse to science, we never forget that our God demands justice and has primarily given man the duty of stewardship over creation. The Holy Bible says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Genesis 2:15 NIV1984).

Agricultural genetic engineering as well as the more advanced nano technology and synthetic biology are extreme means of modifying life that must be treated with caution.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is common knowledge that small scale farmers are the ones feeding the world. While millions go to bed hungry, a whole lot of food goes either into animal feeds or is wasted. The problem of hunger is not primarily that of lack of food, but of lack of access to food. For us in Nigeria another key factor is the wastage of our harvests due to poor rural infrastructure and little or no value addition.

We have also heard talks of GMOs being the key to providing nutrition for our children. Our recommendation is that more effort should be aimed at ensuring that our people eat locally produced wholesome food and keep to diets that are culturally and ethically suitable. Nigeria must be very careful about accepting risks without caution.

Let me conclude this goodwill message by saying that the National Biosafety Management Agency Act of 2015 is hardly known by the majority of Nigerians. There are key areas of concern with that law and it would be unwise for government to use that law as a basis to introduce foods and organisms into Nigeria that may not be in our best interests. All hands must be on deck to support our farmers.

There have been statements in the media that we already have GMO products on our market shelves. If this is true, this conference should raise a wake up call to the government over the

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia. Precautionary principle. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precautionary\\_principle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precautionary_principle)

need to ensure that unauthorised foods are not imported into Nigeria. In addition, any food or products that contain GMOs should be adequately and boldly labelled so that our peoples can exercise their right of choice.

Nothing we do in our environment should negate the principles of justice, sovereignty, sustainability, solidarity, and participation. It goes without saying that Nigerians cannot participate in what they do not know or are not consulted on.

I pray that the Lord grants you all wisdom in the deliberations at this meeting for the good of our country and to His glory.

Thank you.