

POSITION PAPER ON THE FAO INTERNATIONAL TREATIES ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

(Adopted by AFSTA General Assembly on 31st March 2006 in Entebbe, Uganda)

The development of new varieties is essential to increase the productivity of food crops to match the needs of a growing world population.

Farmers and breeders have traditionally relied on open access to genetic resources being wild and weed species closely related to cultivated species, landraces, obsolete and cultivated varieties. However, with the entry into force of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognizing the sovereign right of nations on their biological diversity and promoting bilateral approaches to access genetic resources, this access is now much more complicated.

Countries have rapidly realized that the bilateral approach was not a good solution for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, as they were all strongly interdependent on those resources. For this reason, the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (FAO – IT on PGRFA) was adopted in November 2001 and entered into force in June 2004. The treaty provides for a multilateral system (MLS) under which 64 food crops and forages will be easily accessible pending development of an agreement on a standard Material Transfer Agreement (sMTA).

AFSTA strongly supports the FAO IT on PGRFA. However, the efficiency of the Treaty and of its MLS will depend on the nature of the sMTA. AFSTA urges African Governments to participate actively in the development of a commercially functional sMTA that is:

- True to the spirit of the International Treaty;
- Fair and equitable to all parties;
- In line with normal commercial practice;
- Transparent and easy to implement.

AFSTA also notes that several crops of importance to African Countries are not included in the MLS, pursuant to Annex 1 of the Treaty. AFSTA strongly encourages countries to agree rapidly on the expansion of the list of crops in the MLS, in particular tropical forages and vegetables. Meanwhile, AFSTA considers that important crops for food and agriculture, not yet covered by the MLS and falling under the CBD, should be governed by a MTA similar to the sMTA of the FAO – IT.