

Media Advisory – embargoed until Monday 16 October

## World Food Day: Livestock keepers warn about patents on animal genes

Bonn, Germany, 16 October 2006

*Diversity in our livestock is essential to confront future threats to food supplies but livestock breeds are becoming extinct at the rate of 5% per year. Local livestock keepers and pastoralists hold the key to keeping this diversity alive, if their Rights are recognised. Their voices will be heard at an International Workshop today.*

On World Food Day, small-scale livestock keepers and pastoralists from Africa, Asia and Latin America will demand the safeguarding of Livestock Keepers' Rights to the genes of their breeds.

At an international workshop being held today in Bonn, Germany, they will warn that the increased trend towards patenting may lead to the misappropriation of the livestock breeds on which their livelihoods and future generations depend. They have developed a large diversity of breeds adapted to the broad variety of environments in which they live. The genes in these breeds are attracting the attention of the global animal breeding industry that wishes to appropriate these valuable genes into their breeding lines for industrial livestock production. However, these production systems use only a small number of breeds, and within these breeds the genetic base is narrowing dramatically.

A major objective of the workshop is to prepare for a United Nations conference on animal genetic resources next year in Switzerland. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) will assemble its 180 member governments to decide on a strategic action plan to sustainably preserve these precious resources.

Participants in this workshop will argue that governments should also negotiate an international treaty to safeguard Livestock Keepers' Rights and ensure free access to livestock genetic resources.

**Vivekanandan**, from SEVA, an organisation of livestock keepers in Tamil Nadu, India, will say that without a legally binding, international treaty, livestock keepers and pastoralists will find it increasingly difficult to ensure that future generations have a wide range of livestock breeds.

Panel speaker **Jacob Wanyama** from Vetaid Mozambique will argue that an international ban on patents of animal genes is essential for conservation as well as for poverty reduction.

One of the organisers of the workshop, **Ilse Koehler-Rollefson** from the League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development will point out that high tech solutions such as genebanks containing frozen embryos and semen will not allow locally-specific, dynamic adaptation of breeds to livestock diseases and changing climate patterns. She will argue that livestock breeding by local communities is essential to maintain the dynamic diversity of livestock breeds. These communities are the most important actors in the sustainable conservation of livestock breeds and therefore should be key participants in the FAO conference in Switzerland next year.

70% of the world's poor keep livestock, 640 million livestock keepers are subsistence farmers and 200 million are pastoralists.

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International Workshop on the Future of Animal Genetic Resources: ***Under Corporate Control or in the Hands of Farmers and Pastoralists?*** 16 October 2006 in Bonn, Haus der Evangelischen Kirche, Adenauerallee 37

**FAO** - First International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources, Interlaken, Switzerland, 1-7 September 2007 (<http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/programmes/en/genetics/angrvent2007.html>)

**The League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development** is engaged in advocacy, research and field activities to support pastoralists and marginal livestock keepers ([www.pastoralpeoples.org](http://www.pastoralpeoples.org))

**The German NGO Forum Environment and Development** is an umbrella of German NGOs active in the fields of environment and development ([www.forumue.de](http://www.forumue.de))

**Swissaid** is the Swiss foundation for development cooperation focusing on food sovereignty of local communities ([www.swissaid.ch](http://www.swissaid.ch))

**World Food Day** is celebrated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations each year on 16 October, the day on which the Organization was founded in 1945 (<http://www.fao.org/wfd/2006/whatis.asp>)

### **Contacts**

Friday, 13 October to Sunday 15 October:

**Vivekanandan**, SEVA, India: 0049 177 6691400

**Jacob Wanyama**, Vetaid Mozambique: 0049 177 6691400

**Ilse Koehler-Rollefson**, LPP: 0049 1789714925

**Tina Goethe**, Swissaid: 0041 765165957 (Sunday: 0049 173 7890 718)

Monday 16 October

**Christiane Herweg** 0049 160 - 96958423