

FWCC Statement  
World Intellectual Property Organization  
Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional  
Knowledge and Folklore Session 31  
21 September, 2016

The Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers) would like to comment on the work of the WIPO IGC to reach agreement on a draft text and international legal instrument that will hopefully ensure the effective protection of genetic resources, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions. It is our wish that the present session, together with IGC 32, will facilitate consensus-building among States on how traditional knowledge fits within our international legal system.

An essential relationship exists between traditional knowledge and genetic resources in the context of food security. What seems to be missing from the discussions is more attention to small-scale farmers.

Small-scale farmers actively maintain and further develop the majority of the world's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. These resources are inseparable from the evolving body of knowledge passed down from generation to generation through informal social and economic networks about the unique characteristics of different varieties, the benefits of various management practices, and a deep and evolving wisdom of the interconnection between the health and wellbeing of farmers and their natural environments.

Traditional knowledge associated with food and agriculture is inherently dynamic. Farmers are among those at the forefront of global environmental change — continually innovating and experimenting on-farm, integrating beneficial technologies with existing management practices, and sharing success within their social and economic networks. This evolving body of knowledge is among our greatest assets for mitigating the impacts of climate change and achieving global food security. Yet at present small-scale farmers are among the most food insecure demographic in the world, and we are losing plant genetic diversity and the traditional knowledge associated with it at a rapid rate.

The traditional knowledge associated with food and agriculture is also culturally and spiritually significant to small-scale farmers.

The food security implications of the draft texts relating to the rights and responsibilities over GR and associated knowledge need to be better understood. Questions — such as how the proposed text may support and encourage on-farm innovation; how it may facilitate benefits sharing; or how it may affect the choice and availability of desired technologies — need to be asked and explored.

FWCC acknowledges and appreciates the essential representation of Indigenous Peoples present at this session. However, representation of small-scale farmers, acknowledgement of their being traditional knowledge holders, and the connection between genetic resources, traditional knowledge and food security is lacking. It is critically important for the IGC and those who take part in it to encourage the participation of small-scale farmers, whether or not they identify themselves as Indigenous.

While small-scale farmers could be understood to be included in the definition of 'local communities,' there is value in their explicit recognition. Small-scale farmers should be included as beneficiaries and expressly eligible for support from the committee's voluntary fund — which we hope will be replenished and fully operational very soon. This should in no way detract from resources available to Indigenous Peoples.

The strength, effectiveness and integrity of any treaty addressing intellectual property, genetic resources and traditional knowledge depends on the meaningful participation of non-State actors, including Indigenous Peoples, small-scale farmers, and those that represent them.