

## Jeremy Irons narrates new film about the global impact of GM seed

A new short film being launched online on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> June charts the story of seed from its roots at the heart of traditional, diversity rich farming systems across the world, to being transformed into a powerful commodity, used to monopolise the global food system.

British actor and UN Food & Agriculture Goodwill Ambassador Jeremy Irons, has put his distinctive voice to the film. *"I'm delighted to have been asked to narrate this important film. I think that it carries a critical message, at a critical time. We are on the brink of losing a vast wealth of diversity in our food system, and we'll lose it to the hands of just a few corporations, who give us only the illusion of choice on our shelves."*

*Seeds of Freedom*, a collaborative work from The Gaia Foundation and the African Biodiversity Network features interviews with world-renowned environmental commentators and activists including Dr Vandana Shiva, Zac Goldsmith MP, Caroline Lucas MP, Kumi Naidoo, John Vidal, Dr Melaku Worrede and Henk Hobbelink. The film tells the story of how North American farmers have been sued for being contaminated with GM pollen, how GM cotton has driven Indian farmers into spiralling debt, and how, as seed diversity is displaced by corporate seeds, farmers are made increasingly vulnerable to climate change.

The film highlights the extent to which the industrial agricultural system - and genetically modified (GM) seeds in particular - has impacted on the enormous agro-biodiversity evolved by farmers and communities around the world. *Seeds of Freedom* features the voices of a number of African farmers who have been affected by the introduction of hybrid seeds across the continent, and are concerned about the growing intrusion of GM into Africa's food system.

The private preview launch which took place on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> May was attended by Zac Goldsmith MP, Jonathan Porritt, Patrick Holden and Dame Vivienne Westwood. Dame Westwood commented after the screening, *"this is all about values: the values of big business to make money at any cost, versus the needs of people to survive on a planet that can sustain them. I learnt a lot from the film. GM can sound perfectly reasonable when you listen to the news and hear that GM crops are being designed to not need insecticides and so on. But when you realise the full implication - that it leads to super pests and that nobody's got any defence against it - you realise just how wrong it all is, and what a dangerous path it takes us on."*

Gathuru Mburu of the African Biodiversity Network said *"We wanted to make a film that gave Africa, and the south, a global voice against GM. As the likes of Monsanto, Syngenta, and Bill Gates' Alliance for a New Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) all forge ahead into Africa under the mantra that GM is the only way to feed the population, African farmers are shouting "no", but their voices are being drowned out! GM technology has not been developed to aid farmers or to feed hungry people, it's to create new markets for patented seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and commodities."*

Liz Hosken, Director of The Gaia Foundation adds *"Seeds of Freedom brings together a chorus of voices from around the world, asserting that in spite of the corporate drive to control our food system, small farmers are still providing 70% of the world's food. We are at a critical turning point now, as the global food sovereignty movement builds momentum to reclaim control of ecologically sane and socially just local food systems, which celebrate and enhance diversity and hence resilience."*

The 30-minute film is a co-production of The African Biodiversity Network and The Gaia Foundation, in collaboration with local Ethiopian partner MELCA Ethiopia, and international partners Navdanya and GRAIN. Seeds of Freedom will be online for international audiences to watch and download for free at [www.seedsoffreedom.info](http://www.seedsoffreedom.info) on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> June.

## **- Notes to Editors -**

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A three-minute trailer of the film can be viewed here: [www.seedsoffreedom.info](http://www.seedsoffreedom.info)

Media advanced access to the film can be arranged.

Stills from the film, and images of indigenous seeds, traditional farmers, and of the private launch event held at the Garden Museum in London on 28<sup>th</sup> May are available upon request.

### **The film features contributions from the following:**

Dr Vandana Shiva, (Director of Navdanya, author of the 2011 report *The GMO Emperor has No Clothes*), Zac Goldsmith MP, Caroline Lucas MP, Kumi Naidoo (Head of Greenpeace International), John Vidal (Environment Editor, *The Guardian*), Dr Melaku Worrede (Ethiopian Scientist and pioneer of seed saving methods in Ethiopia), Gathuru Mburu (Coordinator of the African Biodiversity Network, Kenya), Liz Hosken (Director of The Gaia Foundation), and Henk Hobbelink (Coordinator of GRAIN International, who recently published *The Great Food Robbery*), Percy Schmeiser, a Canadian farmer who was sued by GM giant Monsanto when they found that his crops had been contaminated by their GM gene.

### **Soundbites from the film:**

*"Farmers breed for resilience. And therefore they breed for cooperative arrangements. They don't breed one crop. They know they must have many crops because the climate changes. They know they must have many crops, because nutritional needs are diverse. Once a company starts to see royalty collections from every seed, it pushes its genetically engineered crops, to replace the native crops that farmers and peasants have grown over millennia."*

*Vandana Shiva, Director of Navdanya International, India*

*"What are we supposed to do with these GM seeds? Seeds are supposed to be planted, multiplied, exchanged, further adapted, and so on. That's exactly what is not allowed from the corporate mindset. The corporations sell or license us the seed to use the seed in a specific way – the way that they are interested in. Full stop."*

*Henk Hobbelink, Coordinator of GRAIN International, Spain*

*"It's nothing to do with feeding the world. It's nothing to do with tackling some of the huge issues we're facing today. It's about control of the food sector, of the food economy. We need to radically change course, and return to diversity"*

*Zac Goldsmith MP*

### **In support of the film:**

*"Yet another important piece of the puzzle that we needed to get the full picture of what a*

*makers to protect the branch we are sitting on, them included, and so they need to return the rights to the seeds to their legal owners, the farmers"*

*Dr Hans R Herren, President Biovision Foundation and Millennium Institute*

*"Seeds of Freedom is a powerful film with an important message. There is a new wave of cultural imperialism taking place right now in the field of biodiversity and seed. We are losing our critical seed diversity to just a handful of corporations in the western world. The genetic erosion taking place here is tantamount to ecocide. The rate of farmer suicides because of crop failure and debt is nothing short of genocide. We must decentralise our food system."*

*Vandana Shiva, Founding Director, Navdanya, India*