STATEMENT on GOLDEN RICE and SUPPORT for the Uprooting of Golden Rice by the Farmers in Bicol

On August 8, 2013, more than 80 indigenous peoples’ leaders and representatives from different communities in the Philippines crafted an Indigenous Peoples’ Agenda 2013 to be submitted to the Philippine government for appropriate action. Part of this agenda states: “Stop the entry and proliferation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and toxic, banned and harmful farm inputs in indigenous peoples’ lands and territories.” This means that indigenous peoples don’t want nor need GMOs as a solution to the hunger and poverty that they are facing. Instead, what is needed is indigenous peoples’ full control over their land and resources.

In this light, the Philippine Task Force for Indigenous Peoples’ Rights (TFIP) expresses its support for Kilusang Magbubukid ng Bikol and SIKWAL-GMO, a broad alliance campaigning against genetically modified organisms and the control of agricultural transnational corporations. On August 8, 2013, these organizations uprooted golden rice seedlings in a testing field in Pili, Camarines Sur, Bicol Region. This action shows the farmers’ and people’s indignation against these genetically-modified crops, whose safety on the health and benefits to the agricultural production of Filipino farmers, have not been established.

For indigenous peoples, much is at stake if golden rice is finally commercialized and proliferated in the agricultural market. This may cause defects or contamination to traditional rice varieties which the indigenous peoples have produced for subsistence for generations. The golden rice seeds could eventually reach indigenous peoples’ hands and cause the traditional and sustainable food production that they practice to be lost. This is a potential threat to indigenous peoples’ food sovereignty and self-determined development.

If the tests of golden rice, which will allegedly combat Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) in children, will push through, one of the related activities will be test feeding this crop to children. There is a great possibility that children in indigenous communities will be targeted for these tests. We are concerned that, with the anomalous, deceitful and coercive practices in relation to acquiring the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of indigenous communities, indigenous children’s lives and welfare will be put at risk.
We believe that golden rice is not an appropriate solution against vitamin A deficiency and malnutrition. Giving the farmers the freedom to plant according to their needs in a land that they consider their own is more sustainable than market-driven impositions. Indigenous knowledge in agriculture and seed development must be recognized and respected. GMOs have proven to benefit only the profit-oriented TNCs and not the Filipino people. Therefore, the resistance against these must be strengthened and sustained.